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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal, comparative case study examines the impact of enrollment decline on and the response to it by 15 suburban school districts in 2 metropolitan areas. Data were collected during 1978-81 through interviews, observation of public meetings, documentary and statistical sources, and case histories developed for each district from 1964-81. The central issues examined in this report are: the impact upon public school governance of the changeover from growth and relative affluence to declining enrollments and tight budgets; the effect of such changes on policymaking and conflict management in declining school districts; the characteristics of such districts in such key factors as socioeconomic status, fiscal circumstances and conflict propensity; and the perceived consequences of decline for educational programs, educational service delivery, students and teachers. The study suggests that the rational planning approach provides more successful retrenchment decisions than those produced by more political or ad hoc approaches. Six tables include selected data on enrollments and community socioeconomic status, enrollment decline and fiscal strain, and changes in size, occupation, income, and education of population. Five appendixes summarize the original study, present interviews and fieldwork, examine measurements and causes of fiscal strain, outline problems and limitations of citizens' advisory committees, and list publications emanating from the project. (PB)

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SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN AN ERA OF RETRENCHMENT

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Fall, 1982

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SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN AN ERA OF RETRENCHMENT

Abstract

Despite inescapable ambiguities and controversy, efforts to pursue rational, consensual school retrenchment decisions in response to enrollment decline are worthwhile. The rational planning approach is clouded by the ambiguity of educational ends and means and, contrary to the professional advice literature, seldom will minimize conflict. Yet, a comparison of the 15 school districts included in this study shows that the rational approach is associated with "better" retrenchment decisions than those produced by more political or ad hoc approaches.

Other significant findings of the study call attention to the political implications of the allocative features of decisions, to the characteristics of the "new politics of education," and to the transformation of school-community relations, including new linkages and dependencies vis-a-vis other community institutions.

The impact of enrollment decline and the response to it by school districts in varying circumstances were investigated by means of a comparative case study of 15 suburban school districts located in two metropolitan areas. By design, the districts varied in rate of enrollment decline, size, social heterogeneity, socioeconomic status, fiscal circumstances, and conflict propensity. Data were collected on the experience of the districts over the period from 1964 to 1981 by means of interviews, observation of public meetings, and documentary and statistical sources.

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SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN AN ERA OF RETRENCHMENT*

By

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Executive Summary

How have school district officials modified their policies and developed plans to respond to the challenging realities of declining enrollments? How have they sought to manage or minimize the conflict that tends to accompany rapid change and retrenchment? To what extent does variation in community and school district characteristics affect retrenchment policy making? These questions, along with a concern for both the consequences of decline and the consequences of the policies selected in response to decline, are central to the research that is reported here.

Because communities and school districts vary in their circumstances and characteristics, they vary in their ability to manage change and the tensions and conflict that accompany it. Put another way, they vary in their fiscal and management resources and in their ability to achieve agreement about public policies. Some communities easily attain a wide degree of consensus (or at least acquiescence) on most local policies.

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Other communities are riddled with factions and cleavages and thus abound in social "fault lines" that contribute to the escalation of conflict.

The study reported here began as a follow-up of an earlier comparative case study concerned with explaining differences in conflict propensity and conflict management among different kinds of school districts, particularly differences between working class and upper-middle class suburban school districts. To test the conclusions reached on this subject in research by David Minar, data were collected (principally by means of interviews) in four working class and four middle to upper-middle class Chicago suburban school districts in the late 1960s. Contrary to Minar's conclusions, these data revealed that it was not simply differences in the levels of organizational and management skills or resources present in the populaces of blue collar and white collar districts that accounted for differences in conflict propensity and conflict management. Instead, community norms regarding the proper conduct of government and politics affected how the management resources present were used--that is, to minimize or mobilize conflict. The norm in white collar districts usually is to avoid or minimize conflict in the community, while norms in blue collar districts generally are supportive of overt politics and bargaining. This difference in norms usually results in a higher incidence and intensity of public conflict in blue collar districts than is found in white collar districts.

In blue collar districts, the policy-making process and school board-staff relationships usually are more overtly "political," and less characterized by the procedures associated with the rational problem-solving model, than is generally the case in white collar districts. Consequently, where management resources are plentiful in the

population, and where the prevailing norms favor a "rational" policy-making process, one should expect to see a more "deliberative" and less "political" policy-making process.

The sudden, and largely unexpected, changeover from growth to declining enrollments in the 1970s presented an intriguing opportunity to revisit the eight Chicago suburban school districts to see how they were responding to the pressures of their changing circumstances. In the past, middle class suburban school districts usually were able to confine their politics to distributive issues whereas urban districts, due to their greater social heterogeneity, were prone to generate conflict-producing redistributive issues. These differences affected how middle class management resources were used in urban and suburban settings. Thus, one of the most interesting questions in revisiting the white collar districts was to see how they responded to the redistributive issues unavoidably generated by the retrenchment pressures brought on by declining enrollments. In other words, shrinking enrollments and budgets tend to create clear winners and losers in allocative decisions. School closings, for example, impose concentrated rather than dispersed costs or burdens. Therefore, it seemed likely that school closing decisions in white collar districts would create situations in which some of the populaces' management resources would be used to mobilize, rather than minimize, conflict, as neighborhoods threatened by school closings would fight to avoid losing their schools. This expectation was borne out by the data collected in the initial follow-up study.

With support from the National Institute of Education, the initial follow-up study was expanded, to enrich the range of comparisons possible, to include a total of fifteen suburban school districts in two metropolitan areas. The central questions of this study, which we sought to answer by means of a longitudinal, comparative case study were:

1. What are the impacts upon public school governance of the change from growth and relative affluence to declining enrollments and constrained budgets?
2. How do these changes affect policy-making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery of educational services in school districts that vary in such key factors as socioeconomic status, fiscal circumstances, and conflict propensity?
3. What characteristics of such districts account for variation in policy making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery of educational services?

Data on the fifteen districts were collected principally through direct observation of meetings and interviews over the three-year period, 1978-79 to 1980-81. In addition, case histories were developed on each of the districts for the seventeen-year period from 1964 to 1981. In sum, data for the study were drawn from (1) interviews with core participants and observors of the policy-making and service delivery processes, (2) observation of school board meetings, (3) documentary sources, (4) election and referenda results, (5) census data, (6) enrollment trend and school building utilization data, and (7) fiscal and operational costs data.

Findings

To appreciate the magnitude of the change that suburban school district officials have had to cope with, one must recognize the extent to which school district planning and policy development were driven by enrollment growth and school construction during the 1950s and 1960s. With the changeover from growth to decline, however, rather than planning around, or trying to influence, other peoples' real estate developments (as, for example, through appeals to zoning boards), school officials increasingly find themselves with real estate problems of their own--that is, surplus space and buildings to manage or dispose of. Thus, real estate management and disposal has emerged as a major new problem for school authorities, especially in larger school districts.

The changeover from growth to decline also has modified the roles of school board members and administrators and has made their jobs more complicated and onerous. In many school districts authorities have had to learn simultaneously how to engage in two new, interrelated processes: cutback management and collective bargaining with teachers. Mistakes made in dealing with either of these processes have serious implications for the successful conduct of the other process. Moreover, the adverse economic conditions of the 1970s have exacerbated the problems involved in declining enrollments and collective bargaining. As a consequence of these problems and pressures, high level executives and professionals now appear less inclined to serve on school boards because the job has become more time consuming and unpleasant.

Our data show that the changeover from growth to decline has had different consequences for different types of school districts facing varying configurations of constraints in terms of such factors as facilities, staff age, and conflict management resources and attitudes. In general, though, the onset of decline hit the higher socioeconomic status districts harder than the lower status ones already used to adversity. For instance, declining enrollments enabled less affluent districts to reduce the overcrowding common in their schools. In more affluent districts excess space resulted almost immediately, creating diseconomies. Also, the divisive nature of retrenchment disrupted the consensual mode of policy making favored in higher status districts. Lower status districts, by contrast, were already used to a political bargaining mode of policy making.

Many people assume that fiscal strain is the main determinant of retrenchment policy making and that it is directly related to the level of enrollment decline. Using slow budget growth as a measure of fiscal strain, we found that the degree of strain is not necessarily related to the degree of enrollment decline. Moreover, fiscal strain does not necessarily predict one of the most important responses to declining enrollments: school closings. These findings indicate that policy making in declining school districts is shaped by a complex configuration of constraints in which enrollment decline and fiscal strain are quite important, but not by themselves necessarily determinative.

Interestingly, however, when we compared our suburban district data with data on ten large, urban school districts, there appeared to be a closer linkage between fiscal strain and school closings in cities than in suburbs. The bulk of the available evidence suggests that larger school districts (i.e., cities) tend to experience more conflict

in responding to decline and are more inclined to delay action on retrenchment (allowing fiscal strain to increase) than are smaller districts.

A tension exists between the professional advice literature on the management of decline and actual practice. Research shows that the professional advice literature is misguided, at least so far as conflict management is concerned, and that certain kinds of school districts are more likely than others to depart from the advice. Upper status districts are more inclined to follow the recommended rational planning and consensus-building strategy, but it seldom enables them to avoid conflict. Significantly, however, it does provide a sense of legitimacy for the policy-making process and tends to produce results that appear more rational than the ad hoc, accidental, or dilatory policy making which seems characteristic of working class and urban districts. The political and organizational circumstances common to large urban school districts usually overwhelm efforts at a rational planning approach and make it very difficult to get agreement on the focused cuts necessary for real cutback management. The delay and temporizing about retrenchment which result exacerbate the already serious problems large urban school districts face. By contrast, because of differences in their political and organizational circumstances, small and suburban districts tend to be able to make focused cuts without excessive, harmful delays, though some, of course, fail to do so.

A major conclusion of our research is that the politics of school closings is far more a "divide and conquer" than a "plan and agree" process. The secret of school closings, sensed by some school officials, is <u>concentrated cuts judiciously targeted</u> to minimize the likelihood of

the formation of resistance coalitions. There always will be resistance to school closings, but if it is isolated it will have little effect. Significantly, rather than being the artifact of Machiavellian tactics, the isolation of opponents to cutbacks will tend to occur spontaneously when participants truly understand the opportunity costs of not cutting back.

Our analysis shows that small school systems, as most suburban ones are, enjoy an important advantage over large systems in the matter of school closings. Small districts usually only need to propose closing one or two schools at a time. In large city school systems plagued by decline, however, it is not uncommon for school officials to propose closing a large number of schools simultaneously. This creates the likelihood in cities of coalitions of affected neighborhoods mounting significant opposition to school closing proposals. This difference between large and small school systems provides part of the explanation for the greater difficulties city school districts are having in closing schools.

It seems clear that the most serious consequences of declining enrollments have been felt in large urban school districts, where delay in action on the problem has contributed to program deterioration, fiscal strain, and even, in a few cases, to bankruptcy and receivership. The heart of the problem lies in the nature of the urban political process and the usual structure of incentives facing urban politicians, which discourages prudent fiscal management. What seems needed, therefore, is a restructuring of the urban political incentive system (1) by making it hard to conceal deficits and (2) by providing new, inexpensive political resources to substitute for those now being allocated in the

political exchange process.

The policies adopted in response to declining enrollments have led to a period of tension and transformation in school-community relations. In many suburban districts there has been a movement away from the once sacrosanct "neighborhood school" concept to a more rural, consolidated type of school attendance area arrangement. Perhaps not surprisingly, this movement generally has been accompanied by a complex symbolic politics regarding the meaning and maintenance of neighborhood schools and neighborhoods. Because neighborhood schools are such a sacred cow in our society, many school administrators prefer not to be explicit about what they are doing. It is easier to avoid the subject or just redefine what they call a "neighborhood school." Consequently, debates about school reorganization alternatives often are blurred by the ambiguous use--both by administrators and citizens--of the symbols of "neighborhoods" and "neighborhood schools."

There is an alternative to this, however, particularly in small school districts. In one small district we studied, school officials have addressed head-on the reality that the concept of the neighborhood schools will not be workable in their setting in the 1980s. As a consequence, they have successfully advanced an alternative value scheme in place of the neighborhood school concept: that of the benefits of a more closely knit, better integrated community and school district as a result of a school organization that divides age groupings but not neighborhoods. Thus, with resourcefulness, school officials may be able to successfully invoke new symbols and values to replace old ones no longer viable in contemporary circumstances.

Whether one is explicit about it or not, the movement away from neighborhood schools to "consolidated schools" is likely to have highly significant and probably positive political consequences: Rather than identifying narrowly with the interests of neighborhood schools, parents will be more able to see the broader interests of the whole school system or at least their portion of the consolidated system. This redefinition of the schools' community should reduce factionalism and aid in the development of more unified public support for the schools, a vital consideration in this time of adverse demographic and economic trends.

Another promising sign of positive adjustments to the changing social, economic, and political environment comes as a somewhat unexpected consequence of declining school systems: There appears to be a strengthening of the articulation of local schools with other local community organizations. As some school districts have been forced to shed some of the peripheral activities and services they formerly provided, they have actively sought the help of other community organizations which could provide substitute activities. This could lead to public schools that are narrower, but more focused in their educational purposes and that, at the same time, are better linked to the wider society through stronger ties to other organizations.

Among those we interviewed, the most consistently negative assessment of the effects of declining enrollment on the quality of education concerns the impact on teachers. The negative effects on the teaching profession include the loss of young teachers leaving the profession; the declining quality of people entering the profession; the shift of teachers away from their major areas of competence largely for reasons

of job security; the greater possibility of overload and "burnout" in an aging teaching force; and a general lowering of morale and job satisfaction. While these effects are not seen by most respondents as having yet caused major damage to the delivery of quality education, they constitute a cause for some pessimism about the future of public school education unless steps are taken to combat them.

A major effect of decline and retrenchment, alluded to above, has been the reduction or elimination of many enrichment programs, extra-curricular activities, and social services offered by the schools. Whether parents, school board members, and administrators believe this is detrimental, neutral or beneficial to the overall functioning of public education depends on what functions and goals of schooling they hold to be of central importance. There was strong disagreement among those we interviewed over whether the core curriculum of the "Three R's" is the overriding concern, or whether, as many educators believe, secondary social and educational services are also of equal importance for the proper development of children. Those who believe schools should concentrate on the core instructional functions of the Three R's are less likely to bemoan the cutting back of what they see as "fat," "fringes," and "frills." But there is dispute also over what constitutes such educational "icing."

In the view of some parents and school officials, programs such as bilingual education, many forms of special education, counselors, social workers and hot lunch programs, are peripheral to the core instructional tasks of the schools. Those holding this view often feel that state and federal mandates forcing districts to continue such programs during decline detract from the ability to maintain the core

instructional programs. Others involved in the school districts, often teachers and more "socially progressive" parents and officials, see the existence of mandates as all that prevents many essential school services from being eliminated during a period of declining enrollment and fiscal strain. Differences in attitude are associated with the kind of children people think the schools should be most responsive to--the "average child" or those with special needs.

Apart from the negative effects on the teaching profession, the other most disturbing development we see involves the implications of the erosion of the school curriculum and associated activities and services. Not only are art, music, library services and the like being cut back or eliminated, but there is evidence that cutbacks of "extras" are occurring sooner and deeper in lower socioeconomic status, less affluent school districts than in higher socioeconomic status, more affluent ones. The irony, of course, is that higher socioeconomic status parents, as compared with lower socioeconomic status parents, are both more able and more inclined to supplement their children's education and compensate for things unavailable or removed from the schools' offerings. If decline and retrenchment are allowed to proceed without adequate financial equalization efforts by state or federal authorities, the result is likely to be more harmful for less affluent school districts and students than for more affluent ones. Local control and "choice" will simply provide another example of the proposition that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To carry out a study of the evolution of school districts and their communities over time requires, above all, the cooperation of the people being studied. In this key element of the study, we have been most fortunate. Our promise of anonymity to participants in the study unfortunately prevents us from thanking by name the school districts and individuals who so graciously cooperated in this study. Many key people, particularly school board members and school superintendents, gave freely of their time and knowledge in several waves of interviews held over the course of the study. The Principal Investigator is especially indebted to the authorities in the eight school districts that not only participated in the original study, in the growth period of the late 1960s, but also kindly consented to participate in the recent follow-up study. Their participation was essential to the longitudinal aspect of this study.

Even with the gracious cooperation of the fifteen school districts in this study, we obviously could not have accomplished this research without the extensive resources necessary for such an undertaking. Here, we wish to thank the National Institute of Education for the grant that made this enterprise possible. Beyond the fiscal resources provided, we also wish to acknowledge the helpful suggestions, assistance, and patience of key people at N.I.E., particularly Bruce Haslam, Fritz Mulhauser, and, in the early stages of the project, Jon Schaffarzick. If all the employees of the federal government were as helpful and competent as these individuals, the notion of "pointy headed bureaucrats" never would have entered the public's imagination.

The Principal Investigator is indebted also to the universities that facilitated and helped support this research: The University of Rochester initially, The Pennsylvania State University more recently, and, indirectly, the Unviersity of Chicago. At the University of Rochester, the research project team included Guilbert Hentschke, Marion Simon, Peter Wood, Dirk Wilmouth, and Win Lowman. The field work in Chicago was performed by Dennis Wheaton, Daniel Olson, Bonnie Lindstrom, and Christine Wright-Isak, all graduate students in sociology at the University of Chicago. All of these individuals contributed ably and importantly to the research effort.

The University of Chicago deserves special recognition for its contribution to this research. From the original study to this expanded, follow-up study, its continuing tradition of research on the sociology and politics of communities and schools has stimulated this inquiry. At various stages of this project, we particularly have benefited by the comments and work of Charles Bidwell, James S. Coleman, Morris Janowitz, Paul Peterson, and Gerald Suttles. In addition, Charles Bidwell graciously made available association with the Educational Finance and Productivity Center at the University of Chicago. From an office in this Center, Dennis Wheaton coordinated the Chicago portion of the study and contributed significantly to this report, as will be evident to readers of this document.

Part of the purpose of the National Institute of Education in sponsoring educational research has been to foster the development of helpful networks or "invisible colleges" of scholars sharing common interests. This aim certainly has been realized in the research

sponsored on organizational processes in education. In addition to the benefits of our association with Charles Bidwell's Center, we have profited from our contacts with other researchers concerned with the problems of declining enrollments. The conference on the subject co-sponsored by N.I.E. and Vanderbilt University in 1982 brought together many of these scholars and facilitated the synthesis of knowledge in this area. Our thinking on the subject has been stimulated particularly by the work of Robert Behn, of Duke; Michael Berger, of Vanderbilt; James Cibulka, of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and Timothy Weaver and Ross Zerchykov of Boston University. In their N.I.E. sponsored work on a handbook on the management of decline, Weaver and Zerchykov have helped to clarify both the dilemmas and options involved in managing retrenchment.

In closing, we wish to acknowledge the highly efficient work of Fran Murphy, who typed this final report. Any shortcomings that remain in the report are the responsibility of the principal investigator.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Purpose and Design of the Study

Social change compounds the problems of governance by adding to the tensions and uncertainties that policy makers face. Of course, some degree of change is occurring constantly in all settings. But in many school districts, particularly in suburban communities, there has been extraordinary change over the past three decades. Rapid growth in population and school enrollments often has been followed by abrupt and precipitous decline in enrollments. Many suburban communities have gone from adolescence directly to old age and also find themselves facing an unexpected and unwelcome variety of urban problems (Masotti & Hadden, 1973).

It is a commonplace, of course, that rapid change produces tensions within society. A colorful example of this, that can serve as a text of sorts for this report, is found in the reaction of farmers in rural Pennsylvania to the early forays of automobiles into their areas. Through an organization called the Farmers' Anti-Automobile Society the following rules for the operation of automobiles were promulgated:

1. Automobiles traveling on country roads at night must send up a rocket every mile, then wait ten minutes for the road to clear. The driver may then proceed, with caution, blowing his horn and shooting off Roman candles, as before.

2. If the driver of an automobile sees a team of horses approaching, he is to stop, pull over to one side of the road and cover his machine with a blanket or dust cover which is painted or colored to blend into the scenery, thus rendering the machine less noticeable.

3. In case a horse is unwilling to pass an automobile on the road, the driver of the car must take the machine apart as rapidly as possible and conceal the parts in the bushes (Clymer, 1968, p. 342).

Faced with substantial decline in enrollments, school authorities have been forced to consider painful retrenchments and reorganization of their school systems. When the problem has become especially acute, school officials, like the early motorists in Pennsylvania, have had to take their school systems apart as rapidly as possible and, in effect, conceal the parts in the bushes, if possible, to minimize public conflict.

How have school district officials modified their policies and developed plans to respond to the challenging realities of declining enrollments? How have they sought to manage or minimize the conflict that tends to accompany rapid change and retrenchment? To what extent does variation in community and school district characteristics affect retrenchment policy making? These questions, along with a concern for both the consequences of decline and the consequences of the policies selected in response to decline, are central to the research that is reported here.

The Impact of Decline on School Governance

In view of recent events in public school districts faced with declining enrollments and funds, one can scarcely dispute James Q. Wilson's (1973) comment that "the politics of scarcity is the politics of conflict." The days of growth, an expanding budgetary "pie," and slack resources with which to "buy off" conflict and mollify antagonists are gone in most school districts. Thus, the changeover from growth to decline has posed unfamiliar and difficult problems for educational leaders, and has increased the importance of the <u>conflict management</u> function of government (cf. Banfield & Wilson, 1963). Yet, despite the obvious importance of these problems there is remarkably little systematic

knowledge about either conflict management in school districts or the dynamics and political and organizational impacts of declining enrollments and school closings.

In part, this shortage of knowledge is due to the persistent, though somewhat eroded, belief that educational government should be nonpolitical and nonpartisan. Yet, public policy making inescapably involves politics. The binding allocation of values and resources through governmental policy decisions is sure both to involve and produce social tensions as policies are the key statements of "who gets what," who shall be indulged and who deprived as a result of the political process. The level of tension and of conflict--defined here as the public confrontation of competing demands, as in elections and public meetings--depends in large part upon the conditions and context within which public policy making takes place. In this study, we were especially interested in the variation in conflict management, policy making, and policy choices which results from differences between school districts in conditions of growth or decline (in student enrollments and funds), affluence or poverty (in assessed valuation of property and general fiscal circumstances), and in social context (e.g., socio-economic status and political traditions and values).

Decline, as a kind of policy problem for public organizations, highlights the tension which exists in public policy making between criteria of efficiency and criteria of consensus and compromise. This is so because decline (or contraction in the size, scope, or funding of organization operations) calls attention to a need for efficiency which is less salient in the midst of the expansion and slack resources

usually found under conditions of growth--except where there is also a marked degree of poverty. (As suggested above, an expanding budgetary "pie" may facilitate--though by no means insure--the avoidance or minimization of conflict.)

Although public sector (political) policy making often is distinguished from private sector (market) policy making by its emphasis upon criteria of consensus and compromise rather than criteria of efficiency, in reality both kinds of criteria are important in the public sector since inefficiency can become a political issue. It is important to note for our purposes, however, that the nonpartisan ideology of the Municipal Reform movement, which has had such a large impact on American city and, especially, school government, argues that no tension need, or should, exist between the two sets of criteria. Underlying this view was an inclination on the part of the leaders of the Reform movement to believe that all conflict is irrational and, in principle, avoidable (Karier, 1973). Hence, the Reformers believed that the rational, impartial deliberation and problem solving which should be characteristic of policy making under the nonpartisan system would, or should, lead to a consensus on the most efficient solution (Karier, 1973). How well nonpartisan districts--which vary in social context and in conditions of growth and affluence--live up to this dictum is one of the important concerns of this study; for to the extent that decline heightens the tension between the two kinds of criteria, the likelihood of high levels of conflict occurring in the policy-making process is increased.

The nonpartisan ideology emphasizes the central importance of professional administrative expertise for efficient, nonpolitical

policy making. Where this view prevails, lay deference to the expertise of administrators tends to minimize the requirements of conflict management. Indeed, trust in experts and the symbols of their knowledge may be crucial components for the tranquil management of organizations, such as educational institutions, which are characterized by ambiguous goals and technologies (cf. Cohen & March, 1974). But how is conflict to be managed when this trust begins to break down, or when the available expertise appears irrelevant or inadequate, as may be the case in dealing with the problems of decline?

As Minar (1967) observed, because school administrators often were unused to being opposed--at least until comparatively recently--conflict often came as a "disorganizing shock." As a result of being relatively unprepared for opposition and conflict, and sometimes ideologically averse to dealing with it, there is evidence that both school administrators and school boards have been prone to attempt to avoid, rather than to manage, conflict (Boyd, 1976b; Kirby & Crain, 1974). And, of course, to the extent that conflict is avoided rather than managed, the content of the policy-making process is altered as potentially important, but disruptive, issues are "screened out" of the process (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962).

However, in addition to mounting local pressures due to declining enrollments and resources, recent state and Federal developments and trends in the governance of public education are increasing both the constraints upon local educational policy makers and the likelihood that they will have to deal with controversial matters arising from the tension between local values and externally imposed cosmopolitan values (Boyd, 1978a, 1978b). The problem, then, is to learn how to manage

decline and concomitant conflict creatively, avoiding the "shrinking violet syndrome" (Downs, 1967, p. 217) and maximizing rather than minimizing leadership opportunities.

Of course, conflict is not always dysfunctional. Indeed, progress frequently requires that conflict be played out. However, better knowledge of the causes and dynamics of conflict may enable leaders to behave in ways which will reduce the likelihood of both unnecessary conflict and intense conflict with traumatic consequences for communities (Coleman, 1957).

To gain this kind of knowledge, and to better understand the dynamics of educational politics under conditions of growth and decline, we need to follow a range of types of school districts through time and see how they respond to the changeover from growth to decline, how this changeover affects the interrelated policy making and conflict management processes, policy choices, and, ultimately, the delivery of educational services.

Background and Design of the Study

Because communities and school districts vary in their circumstances and characteristics, they vary in their ability to manage change and the tensions and conflict that accompany it. Put another way, they vary in their fiscal and management resources and in their ability to achieve agreement about public policies. Some communities easily attain a wide degree of consensus (or at least acquiescence) on most local policies. Other communities are riddled with factions and cleavages and thus abound in social "fault lines" that contribute to the escalation of conflict (Coleman, 1957).

The study reported here began as a follow-up of an earlier comparative case study (Boyd, 1973, 1976a) concerned with explaining differences in conflict propensity and conflict management among different kinds of school districts, particularly differences between working class and upper-middle class suburban school districts. To test the conclusions reached on this subject in research by David Minar (1966a, 1966b) data were collected (principally by means of interviews) in four working class and four middle to upper-middle class Chicago suburban school districts in the late 1960s. Contrary to Minar's conclusions, these data (Boyd, 1973, 1976a) revealed that it was not simply differences in the levels of organizational and management skills or resources present in the populaces of blue collar and white collar districts that accounted for differences in conflict propensity and conflict management. Instead, community norms regarding the proper conduct of government and politics affected how the management resources present were used--that is, to minimize or mobilize conflict. The norm in white collar districts usually is to avoid or minimize conflict in the community, while norms in blue collar districts generally are supportive of overt politics and bargaining. This difference in norms usually results in a higher incidence and intensity of public conflict in blue collar districts than is found in white collar districts.

In blue collar districts, the policy-making process and school board-staff relationships usually are more overtly "political," and less characterized by the procedures associated with the rational problem-solving model, than is generally the case in white collar districts. Consequently, where management resources are plentiful in the population, and where the prevailing norms favor a "rational" policy-

making process, one should expect to see a more "deliberative" and less "political" policy-making process. Specifically, this more rational and deliberative policy-making process will be characterized by:

a. More attention to, and information gathered for, problem/issue definition and identification.

b. More care in formulating the problem or issue.

c. Wider, more extensive search for alternate solutions.

d. More data collection and documentation regarding alternative solutions, and more fully developed rationales for them.

e. Greater discussion and more thorough consideration of the case for alternative solutions.

f. More frequent use of citizens committees to study and assist with all of the above.

g. Less abrupt and precipitous making of policy choices.

h. More frequent appeals to reason, expertise and the need for consensus on "efficient" solutions.

i. More references to pursuing the "right" solution and fewer references to a need to compromise or to give groups what they "want."

(For a summary of Boyd (1973, 1976a) and an explanation of the theoretical rationale and method for selection of the original eight districts, see Appendix A.)

The sudden, and largely unexpected, changeover from growth to declining enrollments in the 1970s presented an intriguing opportunity to revisit the eight Chicago suburban school districts to see how they were responding to the pressures of their changing circumstances. In the past, middle class suburban school districts usually were able to confine their politics to <u>distributive</u> issues whereas urban districts, due to their greater social heterogeneity, were prone to generate conflict-producing <u>redistributive</u> issues (Weeres, 1971). These differences

affected how middle class management resources were used in urban and suburban settings. Thus, one of the most interesting questions in revisiting the white collar districts was to see how they responded to the redistributive issues unavoidably generated by the retrenchment pressures brought on by declining enrollments. In other words, shrinking enrollments and budgets tend to create clear winners and losers in allocative decisions. Put another way, school closings, for example, impose concentrated rather than dispersed costs or burdens. Therefore, it seemed likely that school closing decisions in white collar districts would create situations in which some of the populaces' management resources would be used to mobilize, rather than minimize, conflict as neighborhoods threatened by school closings would fight to avoid losing their schools. This expectation was borne out by the data collected in the initial follow-up study (Boyd, 1979), which showed that it was indeed difficult for white collar districts to maintain their preferred "rational, deliberative" policy-making approach.

With support and encouragement from the National Institute of Education, the initial follow-up study was expanded, to enrich the range of comparisons possible, to include a total of fifteen suburban school districts in two metropolitan areas. The central questions of this study, which we sought to answer by means of a longitudinal, comparative case study, were:

1. What are the impacts upon public school governance of the change from growth and relative affluence to declining enrollments and constrained budgets?
2. How do these changes affect policy-making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery

of educational services in school districts that vary in such key factors as socioeconomic status, fiscal circumstances, and conflict propensity?

3. What characteristics of such districts account for variation in policy-making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery of educational services?

Selected data on enrollments and socioeconomic status for the fifteen school districts are given in Table 1-1, with pseudonyms employed to protect the identity of the participating communities. Since all eight Chicago districts were experiencing declining enrollments, were all rather small elementary school districts (grades K-8), and shared a common location and regional culture, the sample was expanded by adding six larger, comprehensive suburban school districts (grades K-12) in an eastern metropolitan area (here called Marasmus). For comparative purposes, one growing district (Mesick) was selected along with five declining districts in Marasmus. A large, growing district (Arcadia) was also added in the Chicago suburban area for the same reason. (For a detailed account of the theoretical approach of this longitudinal, comparative case study, see Boyd, 1978c.)

Data on the fifteen districts were collected principally through direct observation of meetings and interviews over the three-year period, 1978-79 to 1980-81. In addition, case histories were developed on each of the districts for the seventeen-year period from 1964 to 1981. These case histories focused on the conflict management and policy-making processes in the districts, with special attention to the impact of the changeover from conditions of growth to decline. In brief, data for the study were drawn from (1) interviews with core

Table 1-1

Selected Data on Enrollments and Community Socioeconomic Status

Chicago Districts:	Northview	Camden	Greenwood	Oakton	Arcadia	Weston	Alton	Smithville	Trenton
Enroll. '68	2000	6700	1300	7300	10,200	6200	2650	3500	1850
Enroll. '78	1300	3900	1000	4200	17,100	3800	1800	3600	1350
Median Income	$29,500	17,000	16,500	14,600	14,000	12500	12200	12130	10,550
% Blue Collar*	6	20	17	22	30	49	43	39	52
% Prof'l-Mgrl	55	39	40	33	33	14	16	24	11

Marasmus Districts:	Arbutus	Mesick	Leland	Empire	Karlin	Buckley
Enroll. '68	5800	5900	6000	8200	12700	9700
Enroll. '78	5300	9000	4300	7800	13000	8500
Median Income	$16800	14800	14750	14640	13640	13360
% Blue Collar*	21	27	27	31	37	39
% Prof'l-Mgrl	46	44	35	35	27	34

*Blue Collar = Those listed as craftsmen, operatives and laborers.

Sources: 1970 U.S. Census and School District Data

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participants and observers of the policy-making and service delivery processes, (2) observation of school board meetings, (3) documentary sources, (4) election and referenda results, (5) census data, (6) enrollment trend and school building utilization data, and (7) fiscal and operational costs data. (For details on the fieldwork and interviews, see Appendix B.)

In terms of the longitudinal aspects of the study, coverage of the seventeen-year period was divided into three component parts. First, the study built upon relevant existing case study data on the eight districts in the original study during a period of growth, April 1964 to April 1969 (Boyd, 1973). For the seven new districts added for this study, we constructed case histories for this period of time from documentary and interview data. These case histories focused upon the principal developments, events, issues, and trends within the districts, particularly as they affected or reflected the character of policy making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes at the service delivery level.

While we attempted to make these case histories as substantial as possible, we faced significant limitations in terms of the availability of data. Beyond the school board meeting minutes and newspaper coverage, both of which frequently are sketchy, there usually is little available by way of written data relevant to the history and evolution of school district affairs. This might not be so bad if the long-term recollections of participants (interviewees) typically were quite keen, detailed, and chronological. But, they are not. In spite of all this, we believe that the effort to place school district behavior into a historical, developmental perspective, even if necessarily

somewhat sketchy, is well worthwhile because of the gains in understanding over a static, cross-sectional approach.*

At the least, school board meeting minutes and newspaper stories suggest what the main issues and explicit policy choices have revolved around over time. They also give some idea of the frequency and intensity of attention given to various kinds of policy questions. These kinds of data are useful in tracing the effects of the changeover from growth to decline. In addition, qualitative data such as these can be placed into perspective with quantitative indicators of fiscal and enrollment trends, socioeconomic change in the community, and outcomes in terms of voting behavior in school board elections and tax and bond referenda. As Iannaccone (1967) and his colleagues have shown, these kinds of data are sensitive barometers of the developmental stages and strategic choices within the life-cycle of school districts.

The second component of the study involved the collection of data to continue the case histories for each of the fifteen districts over the period April 1969 to May 1978, during which time most of the districts shifted from growing to declining enrollments. Here, the data availability problems were less serious, especially as we approached relatively recent events that the interviewees could recall easily. The third component of the study involved the indepth study of the ongoing behavior of the districts from May 1978 to May 1981. In the chapters which follow, we report the results of our comparative analysis of these data.

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*If this account of the sketchiness of data on organizational behavior over time seems unduly pessimistic to the reader, we call attention to the same conclusion, both with respect to sketchiness and the value of the effort nevertheless, reached by March and Olsen (1976, p. 254).

CHAPTER II

The Changeover from Growth to Decline

To appreciate the magnitude of the change that surburban school district officials have had to cope with, one must recognize the extent to which school district planning and policy development were driven by enrollment growth during the 1950s and 1960s. In the post World War II years, school district growth was in many ways especially a suburban phenomenon. Further, many suburban districts in the northeast and midwest were still trying to build new schools as recently as the early 1970s.

In the Marasmus area, for example, the Karlin, Leland, and Arbutus districts each attempted to pass building bond referenda in the early 1970s, but were fortunate enough to be deterred by their voters. In a key decision in 1975, the Mesick district, which until very recently was growing, decided not to build a new high school. In the Chicago area, officials in Arcadia, the other "growth" district selected for this study, decided in 1979 to build a new junior high at the same time that they were facing the need to close their first elementary school.

These actions were not illogical. The hazards of enrollment projection in the late 1960s were such that much more growth often was expected. One district, which shall remain nameless, even built an elementary school it never could use. (Other uses were found for the building.) Moreover, many school districts were facing overcrowding at the junior and senior high levels at the same time or shortly before declining enrollments began in the lower elementary school grades. The Empire district, for instance, was on double-sessions at its new

junior and senior high schools in 1968 and 1969.

The precariousness of these "to build or not to build" decisions highlights the extent to which planning and policy development in school districts are dependent upon perceptions and predictions about trends in community development. Officials in fast growing suburban school districts tend to be concerned about the implications of zoning changes and apartment and townhouse developments for the districts' ratio of assessed property value to the number of students to be served. Important decisions also must be made about where to locate new school buildings, and citizens and board members are not unmindful of the ramifications of these decisions for property values and the ecology of neighborhoods.

With the changeover from growth to decline, rather than planning around, or trying to influence, other peoples' real estate developments (as, for example, through appeals to zoning boards), school officials increasingly find themsleves with real estate problems of their own--that is, surplus space and buildings to manage or dispose of. Thus, as Narver, Weatherley, and Elmore (1982) document for Seattle, real estate management and disposal has emerged as a major new problem for school authorities, especially in larger school districts. For instance, school officials are learning, as in the Karlin and Arbutus districts, that it is not always easy to find alternative uses for school buildings that are acceptable to citizens living in the surrounding neighborhoods. Also, school authorities are thinking strategically about real estate options as they plan for the future. Thus, in deciding in 1979 to build a new junior high school while facing the impending need to close an elementary school, Arcadia officials were influenced by possibilities for the sale or lease of certain buildings in the future.

The changeover from growth to decline has modified the roles of school board members and administrators and has made their jobs more complicated and onerous. In many school districts school authorities have had to learn simultaneously how to engage in two new, interrelated processes: cutback management and collective bargaining with teachers (Murnane, 1981). Both of these processes produce adversarial relationships and conflict. Mistakes made in dealing with either of these processes have serious implications for the successful conduct of the other process. The adverse economic conditions of the 1970s--"stagflation" and soaring energy costs--have exacerbated the problems created by declining enrollments. Reflecting on these problems, a school board member told us, "It used to be fun to be a board member. You could make people happy. You could provide special things and programs. Now all you can do is cut back. Though you try not to hurt the educational program, you never know how indirectly (the cuts you make) may hurt the program."

As a consequence of these problems and pressures on board members, a number of the superintendents we interviewed told us that the caliber of person serving on their boards had gone down since the 1960s. They pointed to the declining occupational status of persons on their boards. These superintendents felt that high level executives and professionals were now less inclined to serve on school boards because the job of board members has become more time consuming, conflictual, and unpleasant.

Evidence of these changes in the work of school boards abounds in our data. For instance, when asked if the process of making "hard decisions" due to the pressures of declining enrollments had resulted in any refinement or alteration of the school district's goals or

objectives, a board member replied:

> No, the only change is that it takes longer to reach those goals. I can explain this by saying that every subordinate issue created by decisions made due to declining enrollment became a major issue. So much time is necessary to respond to the results of decisions that are forced upon us by the community or staff. This puts a tremendous pressure on the central office administrators, because the board has advocated responding to the needs of the community. In the one-and-a-half years that I've been on the board, 99% of my time has been spent dealing with these issues rather than what I hoped I'd be accomplishing on the board of education. I've spent very little time dealing with education. That's sad. You can see that in the time you've been watching us. Because of all this we try to get to programs, but before we can turn around, another crisis occurs.

In sum, our findings are consistent with the view of many analysts that policy making and conflict management in decline differ significantly from their characteristics under growth conditions (Behn, 1978a, 1980b, 1980c; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Cyert, 1978; Levine, 1978, 1979). First, resource allocation decisions become far more difficult in decline. The contest, as Behn (1980d: 603) notes, is no longer "over who should get how much of the expansion of the [budgetary] pie, but over who should be forced to absorb what share of the cuts." Put another way, there is a fundamental shift from <u>distributive</u> to <u>redistributive</u> politics: A shrinking budget creates clear winners and losers and no slack resources remain with which to buy off the losers with the payments on secondary issues.

Second, participation is intensified. Consistent with research on decision making showing that humans weight losses more heavily than gains (Tversky & Kanneman, 1974), retrenchment activates wide and intense participation as all organization members and beneficiaries feel a personal stake in the decisions to be made (Behn, 1980c: 618).

Third, retrenchment decisions are complicated by considerations of equity and entitlement. The problem here goes beyond the well known fact that staff layoffs according to seniority tend to conflict with affirmative action objectives. Bardach (1976) argues that a distinguishing feature of the politics of policy termination, particularly where government is involved, lies in the ability of vested interests to advance a powerful moral claim regarding the inequity of changes that would deprive them of arrangements they have learned to rely upon. Thus, what Behn (1978a) calls the "entitlement ethic" supports the view that government has a responsibility to maintain the facilities and jobs that people have come to count on. Indeed, civil servants with tenure may rightly feel that they are being deprived of a property right when their jobs are abolished.

Fourth, morale plummets in declining organizations. Incentives for performance and promotion and career opportunities all tend to dry up. Talented people, who by definition are mobile, tend to abandon the organization for greener pastures (Levine, 1978).

Fifth, organizations cannot be cut back simply by reversing the sequence of developments by which they grew (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Levine (1979) calls this problem the "paradox of irreducible wholes."

Finally, while growth can be managed on an ad hoc basis without grave peril, retrenchment cannot. Systematic planning and analysis become essential (Behn, 1980c). Yet the ability to do this frequently is challenged by the view that the administrative component in organizations should be cut to the bone before the service delivery component is weakened (cf. Levine, 1979).

Factors Affecting Policy Development

It is important to recognize the wide variation in circumstances among school districts faced with declining enrollments. Research over the past decade has led to a new appreciation of the significance for educational reform of the variety of settings and constraints found in school districts (Mann, 1978). In many ways this variety is an even more important consideration for districts facing decline than it was for districts experiencing growth. Entrenched interests and bricks and mortar constraints loom larger in the absence of the opportunities created by an expanding budget and physical plant. Moreover, although declining enrollments are a national problem (with the exception of areas in the Sunbelt states and other pockets of growth), their impact on individual school districts varies. As Florio (1976) notes, "Enrollment is a local phenomenon, in each district a unique configuration of birth rate, population migration, age of community, economic growth in a community, and other factors" (p. 2).

Our research indicates that an understanding of the unique situation confronting each district requires, as a minimum, that the following categories of constraints be taken into account:

(1) Enrollment constraints--the rate and distribution (by grade level and location) of growth or decline within the district.

(2) Fiscal constraints--including such factors as amount of state and other aid, local tax rates, assessed valuation per pupil, and so on.

(3) Fiscal management attitudes--extent to which conservative or liberal fiscal attitudes prevail on the school board in the community.

(4) Conflict management resources and attitudes--availability of managerial skills in the populace; extent to which school board and populace favor a political bargaining or rational-consensual mode of decision making.

(5) Educational program preferences--including degree of complexity and specialization of educational program, grade organization, and so on.

(6) Facility constraints--including size, age, condition, flexibility for use, and location of buildings, plus alternative building utilization possibilities.

(7) Teacher contract/union constraints--provisions affecting reduction in teaching force and such.

(8) Faculty/professional staff constraints--age of staff, distribution in salary schedule, rate of attrition through retirement and mobility, and so on.

(9) Environmental and subcommunity constraints--considerations related to the socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious population distribution and mixture within the district; geographic features affecting school attendance area boundaries; extent of existence of areas with special claims to the maintenance of their neighborhood schools which school boards wish to respect or believe they must respect.

Initial Findings: The Ironies of Adversity

Our findings about the initial impact of the changeover from growth to decline illustrate the differential consequences of decline for different types of school districts facing different configurations

of the constraints outlined above. Our findings also show, in an ironic way, the validity of Coleman's (1957) observation that the past history of communities tends to "weight the dice" in favor of certain future outcomes.

Looking first at the original eight districts, and using data gathered in 1977-1978, we asked the question, "How do school district authorities decide when to close schools and which schools to close?" In particular, we wondered how much of the answer to the first part of the question we might be able to safely infer simply from enrollment data on the eight districts up through 1976-77 (see Tables 2-1 and 2-2). As it turned out, one cannot infer very much, for the factors involved are much more complex--and interesting--than such gross data can suggest. As it happened, only two of the districts, Camden and Northview, had closed schools at that point, although the school authorities in several of the other districts had begun to contemplate the possibility.

If Camden's behavior accords with the implications of the enrollment trend data, how can we explain the failure of Oakton and Weston to close schools when they had virtually the same degree of decline as Camden and when Northview, which ranked below them in enrollment decline, had done so? At the most general level, a large part of the answer may lie in the fact that it appears that the onset of decline hit the higher status districts harder than the lower status ones. Both of the districts which had closed schools, and three out of the four districts with the highest rate of decline, are higher status districts. And, not surprisingly, conflict levels in the same three of the four higher status districts had risen.

Table 2-1

Ranking of Districts According to Growth in Average Daily Attendance, 1958-1959 to 1968-1969

Rank	District	A.D.A. % Change
1	Oakton	+ 300.
2	Weston	+ 120.
3	Smithville	+ 68.
4	Trenton	+ 60.
5	Greenwood	+ 42.
6	Camden	+ 33.
7	Alton	+ 18.
8	Northview	+ 17.

Table 2-2

Ranking of Districts According to Decline in Enrollment, 1968-1969 to 1976-1977

Rank	District	Enrollment % Change
1	Camden	- 32.
2	Oakton	- 31.
3	Weston	- 30.
4	Northview	- 28.
5	Alton	- 23.
6	Trenton	- 22.
7	Greenwood	- 18.
8	Smithville	+ 10.

Interestingly, the general pattern is similar to the findings of Cohen and March (1974) in their study of higher education institutions. They found evidence that the shift from growth to decline initially makes more real difference and is felt more acutely in rich than in poor colleges and universities. Problem activity and discontent suddenly mushroom in rich colleges as a result of the shift to decline. Poorer colleges, by contrast, are more used to adversity, even during times of prosperity and growth.*

Initially, however, decline actually came as a "cloud with a silver lining" for two of the three declining lower status districts (Weston and Alton) since they had a legacy of overcrowding in their schools from the period of growth. Both used the space created by declining enrollments to reduce class size. In addition, Weston was able to reduce its use of mobile classroom units and, at the same time, was able to create music and art rooms in its schools for the first time and special education rooms to meet the new requirements in this area. Although not the whole story, this in large part seemed to explain Weston's ability to go without closing a school to that point.

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*The analogy is not perfect, however, for by design two of our lower status districts (Alton and Trenton) are property rich and one of our higher status districts (Oakton) property poor (see Figure 2 in Appendix A). But our previous study of these districts showed that they nevertheless tended to behave more or less like the other higher and lower status districts respectively. That is, the voters of the low status/property rich districts tended to be tax resistant, like the small home owners in other working class districts, even though only a small increase in the tax rate would be needed to reap large revenue gains from the industrial concentrations in their districts. Similarly, consistent with research showing the higher demand for educational services of higher status than lower status persons (James et al., 1963), the voters in the higher status/property poor district approved numerous tax and bond referenda.

Interestingly, both Weston and Alton tried unsuccessfully several times to pass bond referenda to permit the construction of new schools during the latter part of their period of growth. As in Marasmus, this failure ironically benefitted them when decline set in. By the same token, however, the higher status districts, which kept up with their growth through the construction of new buildings, suffered for their efforts. This aspect of the "ironies of adversity" raises an interesting theoretical point for the understanding of organizational behavior.

Analysts usually have tended to think that the "organizational slack" or "fat" accumulated by an organization during "good" times will cushion the transition to "bad" times and will help the organization survive through these periods. Thus, March and Simon (1958, p. 126) propose that:

> Organizations functioning in a benign environment can satisfy their explicit objectives with less than a complete expenditure of organizational "energy." As a result, a substantial portion of the activities in the organization is directed toward satisfying individual or subgroup goals. The "organizational slack" thus generated has several consequences. It means that organizations typically can find ways of surviving during crisis periods despite their difficulty in discovering possible economies during better periods. . . .

The experience of the school districts we have studied, however, suggests that in dealing with the crisis of decline, if not survival, the "organizational overload" of our overcrowded districts was more of an advantage than the "organizational slack" presumably possessed by our more affluent, uncrowded districts.

Although Oakton, which was the most rapidly growing district in our sample during the 1960s, kept up with its growth by an intensive building program, as of 1978 its authorities still had escaped closing a building in spite of the rapid decline that came on the heels of its

rapid expansion. Several factors made this possible, but perhaps the foremost was the age of Oakton's teaching staff. Because of the district's rapid growth in the 1960s, most of its teaching staff were young and relatively low in its salary schedule. By contrast, Camden serves an older community and most of its teachers were older persons well up in its salary schedule. The resulting difference in personnel costs between the two districts helps explain why Camden had closed three schools (amidst the usual cries of grief from the neighborhoods affected) by the end of 1978 while Oakton was able to get by with only reductions in staff size.

Camden and Oakton also are differentiated by their prevailing attitudes and values. Camden is a substantially more conservative community, both in terms of educational and fiscal management philosophy. Economy and efficiency in the school district have been issues in the past, and the voters have rejected numerous tax and bond referenda over the years, including one for a tax rate increase in the Fall of 1977. This defeat helped seal the fate of the most recent school to be closed. In Oakton, on the other hand, a more liberal attitude prevails. This orientation, in terms of the school board's posture toward the management of decline, was also colored in 1977-78 by the board's increasing sympathy toward the position of the teachers union. This, in turn, was the product of the teachers union's increasing effort to aid in the election of candidates favorably disposed toward them. As of 1978, the voters had supported this trend, and had rejected several incumbent board members along the way.

The most remarkable increase in conflict, however, was found in Northview, which was the epitome of the consensual "high status/low

conflict" district during the original study. There, declining enrollments and soaring costs pushed the school board increasingly in the direction of closing the district's smallest school. As this unpleasant possibility loomed on the horizon, the district's nominating caucus arranged to get a new member elected to the school board to represent the affected neighborhood. This board member proved to be a dissident, splitting the board for the first time within memory. As this issue developed, the abundant management resources within the populace were mobilized, but for different purposes--some to rationally study what should be done and some to resist, with every kind of ingenuity, the adoption of the alternative of closing the small school. This controversy culminated in a law suit which, predictably, those opposing the closing of the school lost.

Along with cost considerations, a factor which weighted heavily with Northview's board in deciding to close the school was the problem that the student enrollment there, 160 students in its last year, had become insufficient, in the view of the professional staff, to enable the flexibility needed for proper grouping of children. This consideration raises the important issue, in decision making regarding school closings, of the interrelationship between school size and educational program preferences. In general, professional educators place more emphasis on the quality of the educational program than on the importance of neighborhood schools. Lay citizens, and parents, generally do not find this such an easy trade-off to make. School board members, however, tend to become socialized to the professional norms on such matters. That such norms truly make a difference also is

suggested by the findings of a study of school closings in Ontario which emphasized the importance of the preferences of educators for schooling within a large complex enabling maximum options for students:

> Small public elementary and secondary schools, such as those in Pelham, were not closed merely because they were too expensive to operate, although that was often the principle justification offered to the taxpayer. Small schools were closed because educators no longer considered them viable (Walker, 1977, p. 71).

Interestingly, our initial findings suggested what we were later to confirm: there are significant differences in attitudes toward small schools between the higher and lower status districts. There is more tolerance for small schools in the lower status districts. Some prima facie evidence for this, in our initial findings, is found in the fact that each of the four lower status districts had at least two schools with enrollments of under 250 students and, indeed, the four districts together had no less than thirteen such schools. By contrast, only one such school remained among the four higher status districts. In the main, the explanation for this pattern is that in the lower status districts the high value placed on the maintenance of neighborhood schools is less likely to be challenged than in the higher status districts by considerations of the quality of the educational program. This is so because lower status populaces do not demand or expect as complex or sophisticated an educational program as do the higher status populaces. Fiscal considerations and preferences at the time of the growth and construction of schools in the lower status districts probably also play a part in the complete explanation of the pattern of distribution of small schools.

The case of Alton illustrates the attitudes in lower status districts toward small schools and also suggests how the political orientation

found in such districts may affect decline-related policy making. In 1977, five of Alton's seven schools had under 250 students. Though the school superintendent thought several of the schools were too small to permit the maintenance of a truly desirable educational program, the community and the school board nevertheless desired to keep all the neighborhood schools open. But, despite the district's high assessed valuation of property, declining enrollments and continuing voter resistance to increasing the educational tax rate brought the school authorities to the verge of closing two schools early in January 1977. However, at that point citizens from the neighborhoods affected came forward and asked the board to hold another tax rate referendum which they would attempt to get passed. The board agreed to do this and promised that if the referendum were passed the two schools would be kept open for at least two more years. That spring the referendum was narrowly passed and all of the schools remained open. In contrast to this pattern, the school authorities in the higher status districts, as in the original study, showed less inclination to engage in political bargaining and compromise than did those in the lower status districts.

Besides varying opinions on the minimum enrollment needed for a viable school, school location clearly is another quite important factor influencing decision making regarding which schools to close. Indeed, the location of a school can override its vulnerability due to low enrollment and save it from being closed, or at least long delay such a decision. One common way this occurs is when a school is located in a physically isolated or peculiarly distinct area of a school district. The latter may occur when a district includes bits and pieces of several communities or when there is some kind of ethnic, racial or religious

"ghetto" area. Such considerations create areas with special claims to the maintenance of their schools. Typically, what seems to happen is that such schools are eliminated at the outset from the list of schools to be scrutinized for candidates for closing.

Several of the school districts under study included such schools. Moreover, two of the lower status districts, Smithville and Trenton, have all-black neighborhoods, each with a small elementary school which has been de facto segregated. Both districts have grappled with what to do about these schools and, prior to the onset of decline, one of the suggestions in one of the districts was to close the school. Open enrollment plans and other more substantial efforts toward desegregation have been tried, but it appears that any thoughts of closing schools in these districts would have to take into account the special problems posed by these schools. For instance, a statement by the State Superintendent of Schools concerning the possibility of busing black inner-city children to vacant suburban schools touched a sensitive nerve in many Chicago suburban communities. There is anxiety about this possibility, especially in working class districts near the city where, our interview data suggest, there is a feeling of vulnerability on this count.

Conclusion

On the basis of our initial findings, we proposed the following working hypothesis: Contrary to earlier findings regarding conflict levels under growth conditions (Minar, 1966a, 1966b; Snow, 1966; Boyd, 1973), conflict levels associated with declining enrollments, and especially school closings, will be as high and perhaps higher in

higher status districts than they will be in lower status districts. This is likely to be the case because:

(1) The populaces of higher status districts appear to place a higher value on education than do those in lower status districts.

(2) Higher status districts are less used to adversity than are lower status districts and will experience and feel more change as a result of the shift to declining enrollments.

(3) Credibility gaps seem to develop quickly regarding whether school boards have <u>already</u> made up their minds as to which schools to close when public deliberation begins. This suspicion tends to undercut much of the value of the extensive public deliberation and community involvement schemes which higher status districts are inclined to employ as conflict management techniques.

(4) Since school closings are such strongly redistributive issues, that is, inflict such concentrated costs, they will prompt the use of some of the abundant management resources in higher status districts to mobilize rather than minimize conflict.

(5) The rational-consensual ("public-regarding") policy-making orientation, which tends to be prevalent in higher status districts, may be less well suited for dealing with redistributive issues, for example, in seeking and striking compromises, than the more "political" ("private-regarding") policy-making orientation prevalent in lower status districts.

CHAPTER III

Policy Making and Conflict Management in Declining School Districts*

To what extent do fiscal pressures override other factors and determine policy making in declining school districts? Do the pressures produced by declining enrollments and fiscal strain affect policy making in the same or different ways in different types of school districts? How have educators typically sought to circumvent the rancorous conflict that usually attends retrenchment policy making? These are the questions we seek to answer in this chapter.

In order to place our findings into a more meaningful perspective, we shall compare the behavior of our small to medium-sized declining suburban school districts with available research findings on the behavior of large declining urban school districts. This comparison reveals significant differences between types of school districts. Our analysis indicates that these differences have far-reaching implications for educational policy and management and the politics of education in an era of retrenchment.

Fiscal Strain and Retrenchment Policy Making

Although we showed in Chapter II the importance of variation in the configuration of constraints facing declining school districts, some people may suspect that what really counts, among all these constraints, are fiscal constraints. Unquestionably, fiscal constraints are quite important in shaping the response to decline: As Zerchykov (1981) observes, ability and willingness to pay in large part determine whether

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*Dennis R. Wheaton assisted in the preparation of this chapter.

declining enrollments are viewed as a problem. If some declining districts are much harder pressed financially than others, it is reasonable to expect that they will be forced to institute more cutbacks and sooner than will more affluent districts. To the extent that this assumption is correct, a simple economic explanation may, by itself, account for most of the observed variance in school district behavior.

In recognition of the potential dominance of fiscal constraints, within the configuration of constraints forming the matrix for policy development, we sought, with the assistance of Guilbert Hentschke, to develop a standardized measure of fiscal strain to facilitate the comparison of the response of school districts to declining enrollments. (On this effort, see Appendix C.) This turned out to be a more complex task than it might appear. Operating budgets for school districts do not provide a reliable measure because there is evidence that officials tend to underestimate income and overestimate expenditures (Hulpke & Watne, 1976). Similarly, higher tax rates could reflect increases in taste for education as well as a response to fiscal strain. Increases in short-term debt could reflect a lack of fiscal control and ease of access to financial markets as well as fiscal strain.

After considering various alternatives, we concluded that the best single measure of fiscal strain is slow budget growth, i.e., the degree to which total annual school district budgets are <u>not</u> increased. Beyond its intuitive, logical appeal, a rationale for this measure can be derived from William Niskanen's (1971, 1973) argument that, in the absence of a profit motive, public sector executives are motivated to maximize the size of their annual budgets:

> Among the several variables that may enter the bureaucrat's motives are: salary, perquisites of the office, public reputation, power, patronage, output of the bureau, ease of making changes, and ease of managing the bureau. All except the last two are a positive function of the total budget of the bureau during the bureaucrat's tenure. The problems of making changes and the personal burdens of managing a bureau are often higher at higher budget levels, but both are reduced by increases in the budget (Niskanen, 1973, p. 22).

It should be noted, as Niskanen emphasizes, that (1) public employees will encourage executives to maximize budgets, and (2) budget maximization may or may not be consistent with higher level goals. With respect to the latter point, for instance, a school superintendent might well face a school board interested in holding the line on expenditures. Even though the superintendent would be likely to adopt that objective, as a result of the board's position, the superintendent probably would prefer, other things being equal, to be moving in a direction (i.e., budget growth) consistent with the usual source of benefits for his or her role.

But what does this approach to fiscal strain reveal about our fifteen school districts? Table 3-1 presents a ranking of the districts according to the percentage of enrollment decline (as of September 1979) since the peak enrollment year in each district. Along with this, one can see a ranking on the percentage of change in district budgets over the three-year period, 1976-77 to 1979-80.

Many people tend to assume that fiscal strain goes hand-in-hand with the degree of enrollment decline. It is clear from Table 3-1 that this is not necessarily the case.[1] More important, Table 3-1 reveals that fiscal strain does not necessarily predict one of the most important responses to declining enrollments: school closings. Even though

Table 3-1

Rankings on Enrollment Decline and Fiscal Strain

School District	Locale*	% Decline (as of 9/79)	Since Peak Enroll. Yr.	Ranking on Fiscal Strain	% Change in Budget, '76-'77 to '79-'80***	Fiscal Strain Category
1. Oakton	C	47.5	1968	4	+ 8.8	High
2. Camden	C	47.4	1969	7	+13.4	Medium
3. Weston	C	42.6	1970	2	+ 6.6	High
4. Alton	C	39.8	1970	1	- 2.4	High
5. Northview	C	38.1	1968	8	+15.3	Medium
6. Leland	M	31.8	1968	6	+13.2	Medium
7. Greenwood	C	31.4	1969	12	+21.7	Low
8. Trenton**	C	29.9	1968	5	+10.3	High
9. Buckley	M	25.9	1971	11	+20.3	Low
10. Arbutus	M	20.9	1970	9	+18.2	Medium
11. Empire	M	19.3	1972	10	+18.9	Medium
12. Smithville**	C	15.5	1971	3	+ 8.7	High
13. Mesick**	M	7.5	1976	13	+32.1	Low
14. Karlin	M	6.9	1971	14	+32.9	Low
15. Arcadia	C	4.8	1977	15	+44.7	Low

*Locale: C = Chicago; M = Marasmus

**Denotes districts that still had not closed a school as of June 1981.

***Based on actual dollars, unadjusted for inflation.

Trenton and Smithville were high on fiscal strain and had substantial enrollment decline, neither had closed a school as of June 1981. At the same time, the two districts lowest on both enrollment decline and fiscal strain (Karlin and Arcadia) nevertheless had closed schools. These findings support our initial view (Boyd, 1979) that policy making in declining school districts is shaped by a complex configuration of constraints in which enrollment decline and fiscal strain are quite important, but not by themselves necessarily determinative. Put another way, it is clear that a good deal of unexplained variance in school district behavior remains after taking account of our measures of enrollment decline and fiscal strain.

The principal reasons for the exceptions noted above can be summarized briefly: In Trenton, the main objective of the majority on the school board, for more than ten years now, has been to protect the all-white portions of the district by keeping black elementary students confined to a school in their own neighborhood. People in Trenton recognize the high cost of keeping open the underutilized all-black school, but the priority for segregation overrides even the extremely conservative fiscal attitudes of the school board and community. Smithville shares with Trenton a somewhat similar (but much less pronounced) concern for the containment of black students within the district. But Smithville also is a larger district and possesses an array of school buildings and grade arrangements within buildings that so far has permitted ad hoc adjustments to smooth out enrollment disparities between buildings. Karlin and Arcadia, the two largest districts in the study, possess both pockets of growth and decline. This fact is the major reason for them having closed schools despite

low levels of enrollment decline overall. By contrast with Karlin and Arcadia, the Mesick district had not closed a school despite a slightly higher level of enrollment decline. This was possible in Mesick because the district never really had a neighborhood school system, but instead operates rather large schools drawing students from broad areas of the district. This fact has enabled the district so far to keep adequate numbers of students in each building.

Some data on large city school districts provide a further test of the fiscal strain notion. Table 3-2 presents data on ten large city school systems studied by Cibulka (1982a). Although there is a rough correspondence among the rankings of the cities on enrollment decline, service reductions, and expenditure change, there are some anomalous relationships, such as in Dallas and Los Angeles. However, in another paper dealing with the same cities, Cibulka (1982b) shows that, "In most cities the first school closing effort, or the first effort to close a large number of schools at one time was closely linked to a budget problem" (p. 15). On balance, our suburban data and Cibulka's urban data suggest that there may be a closer linkage between fiscal strain and school closings in cities than in suburbs. This is likely because the bulk of the evidence, discussed later, indicates that large school districts (i.e., cities) tend to experience more conflict in responding to decline and are more inclined to delay action on retrenchment (allowing fiscal strain to increase) than are smaller districts.

Table 3-2

Comparative Data on Enrollment Loss,
Selected Service Reductions, and Expenditure Changes
1974-75 to 1980-81

School Systems	Enrollment Decline		Selected Service Reductions			Expenditure Changes[d]		
	Degree	Rank	School Plants Closed[a]	Net Staff Changed[b]	Rank[c]	Aggregate	Per Pupil	Rank[e]
Atlanta	21.1[f] %	4	16.0 %	- 5.0 %	4	-23.3 %	- 0.7 %	2
Baltimore	30.1	2	7.5-10[g]	- 1.1[h]	5	-23.2	+10.0	4
Boston	20.1	5	26.0	29.0[i]	1	- 2.4	+23.6	6
Chicago	14.6	7	13.0[j]	-11.2	2	-28.9	-11.7	1
Dallas	14.5	8	0.0	+46.0	8	+ 7.5	+24.3	7
Los Angeles	10.0	10	0.0	+40.1	7	- 9.2	+ 1.0	4
Milwaukee	25.9	3	15.3	- 9.3	2	-11.7	+19.1	5
New Orleans	13.2	9	5.0	+20.7	6	- 1.1	+14.0	6
New York	15.5	6	8.1	-28.1	3	-26.2	-12.6	1
Seattle	30.5	1	22.0	-33.0	1	-24.2	+ 8.8	3

[a]Note that while most closings occurred since 1974-75, and they share a common base period for comparison with net staff changes, these figures do include school closings made in a few cities in the early 1970s. (Since the exact year of these early closings was not always available, it was thought best to calculate all systems on a uniform base). Percent calculated on basis of 1980 school facilities.

[b]Includes Operations Fund (or its equivalent) positions only. Hence, excludes some federally funded positions and, in some cities, state-funded categorical positions. Despite local differences in the base measurement, percentage shifts should be valid, assuming positions were not shifted out of operations fund to external funds between 1974-75 and 1980-81.

[c]Computed by using the ranking of school systems on each of the two measures. The points were added to obtain a composite rank. The lower the score, the greater the service reductions, relative to each other.

[d]Adjusted for 1967 dollars using the consumer price index (CPI) for each city. The all-city average was used for New Orleans because a city average is not available.

(Continued on next page)

Table 3-2 (Continued)

[e]Computed same as service reductions. See footnote b above.

[f]Computed between 1974 and 1980 because 1981 figure was not available.

[g]Exact number unavailable. Hence the range between the lowest estimate and the highest is provided.

[h]Adjusted with Budget and Financial Management data to April 30, 1981. Includes all sources of funds.

[i]Reflects adjustments to 1981 based on court reports and annual (Oct.) report to state. Excludes state and federal positions. Update to 1981 is included here because staffing cuts were made late in Fiscal 1981 and early in Fiscal 1982, but were not clearly separated by fiscal year. Moreover, 1981 budget is largely the same as 1980, less CPI adjustments.

[j]This figure is approximate because it includes schools which were closed but replaced. It was possible to identify and subtract only one of those cases from the list. On the upside, the figure omits the closing of 1120 mobile and other units, estimated to be the equivalent of 56 school buildings (at 20 classrooms per school). If these are included, the percent of schools closed could be estimated at 20 percent.

SOURCE: J.G. Cibulka, "Enrollment Loss and Financial Decline in Urban School Systems." Paper presented at conference on "Managing Enrollment Decline," Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, February 26, 1982.

Rationality and Retrenchment

A key problem for school authorities faced with retrenchment decisions is "how to do the rational while accommodating the emotional (i.e., political)?" (Zerchykov, 1981, p. 7). That retrenchment decisions do produce emotion, conflict, and complex cascades of secondary issues and demands is made painfully clear in the following statement by the superintendent of the Oakton district, our most rancorous case. In an interview shortly after he had submitted his resignation, he said that he had argued against the closing of two elementary schools at the end of that school year. When the school board voted to do so anyway, the result, in his view, was a serious fragmentation of district parents, teachers, and others:

> Since then, every group affected by the closings has organized and is competing for influence on the board. Brown School parents organized, Polk School parents organized. Sometimes they competed, sometimes they combined. Lincoln School parents organized because of the Brown School kids coming into that building. And other Lincoln School parents, whose kids were being transferred to another school to make room for the Brown School kids coming in after the changing of attendance boundaries, organized against the Brown parents, who they saw as usurpers.
>
> The learning disability (LD) kids at Lincoln were moved to the Maple School, and their parents organized. Maple LD parents organized to protest against their school receiving Lincoln LD students. There was a problem with LD teachers leaving Lincoln. The Oakton Educational Association (OEA) union was overseeing the switches at that time, and teachers with vested interests in Polk and Brown formed a pressure group.
>
> Fisk parents, who saw themselves as next in line, organized. There was also an organized faction of parents of the faction of Polk kids who were transferred to Robertson School, probably because blacks were in Robertson, although it's an excellent school. The Brown parents protested against their kids going to Lincoln because Brown was considered a higher quality school than Lincoln.

> Brown parents also formed a Safety Committee and a Program Committee. They felt it was dangerous for their kids to walk to the more distant schools without adequate sidewalks and traffic lights.
>
> From all that comes the Save our Schools (SOS) organization--from Brown and Polk parents, mainly. There was also an organized group called Concerned Oakton Parents (COP). Leaders of both these groups combined and went to the courts to stop us.
>
> How the board dealt with that became mostly a matter of survival. They listened to everyone, but there were so many competing demands by so many groups that the demands were impossible to meet. So they met with those demands that were within their proposed system and didn't conflict with other groups' demands. The board could deal with demands concerning provisions of the moves of students, but not with those demands affecting where the students went. There were many pieces of the puzzle of who to move where, and it finally came together and was refined for fit by the various demands, but if the demands didn't fit the puzzle, they couldn't be met.
>
> So if a group of parents wanted free busing--a red carpet into the schools--or a joint PTA, for example, the board did everything it could to meet the request. LD parents, for instance, set up a list of demands associated with the moving of their children--17 or 20 demands. We were able to meet most of them, except for the demand to keep them at Lincoln, which they included as a bargaining position and did not expect us to meet it. Sometimes that kind of bargaining did in fact affect the whole district in terms of organization and procedure. You say "Yes, you have legitimate concerns about your kids getting to school" to one set of parents, then out pop others who say give us safety busing, too. . . .

How, then, have educators typically sought to circumvent the rancorous conflict that usually attends retrenchment policy making? Consistent with the influential heritage of the municipal reform movement, the extensive literature of professional advice on the management of declining enrollments emphasizes the need to follow a strategy of broad citizen involvement in policy making through a rational planning, problem-solving and consensus-building process (Zerchykov, 1981). Such an approach is supposed to produce both agreement and high

quality decisions. As it turns out, the emerging evidence makes it increasingly clear that the professional advice strategy is misguided. Both Zerchykov's (1981) perceptive review of the literature and Berger's (1982) secondary analysis of seventy case studies, via the case survey method, show, contrary to the conventional wisdom, that the more comprehensive and extended the planning process, the greater is the opposition to school closing decisions.[2] Berger (1982) concludes, therefore, that school officials "may want to consider swifter, less technical planning techniques to avoid [or reduce] community protest" (p. 21).

On the other hand, as Berger (1982) notes, minimizing opposition is only one of several goals in retrenchment policy making. School officials consequently must seek a delicate balance between not entirely compatible objectives: (1) discovering the "best" or at least a desirable and defensible educational solution or adjustment to declining enrollments which, at the same time, is politically viable; (2) securing community and staff understanding and consent; (3) maintaining legitimacy for the policy-making process; and (4) moving rapidly enough toward closure on retrenchment decisions to avoid the apparent tendency for conflict and opposition to increase over time. In view of the tension among these objectives, it is not surprising that school officials actually tend to depart from the professional advice strategy. Interestingly, however, our research suggests systematic variation among the inclination of different types of school districts. Upper-middle class suburban school districts seem most prone to try to follow the strategy, while working class and large urban school districts are much

less inclined to pursue the "rational" model.

Of course, much of the recent literature on policy making in organizations debunks the rational planning model. Particularly for public sector organizations, but also increasingly for private sector organizations (Pfeffer, 1981), the policy-making process is described as incremental, chaotic, and political (e.g., Lindblom, 1959; March & Olsen, 1976) rather than being comprehensive, systematic, and rational. At the same time, however, there is evidence that organizations under the pressures of decline ultimately tend to be forced to abandon ad hoc, incremental policy making in favor of "calculated risks" which provide more comprehensive responses to the problems they face (Behn, 1980c; Glassberg, 1978; Rubin, 1980; But see Hirschman, 1970).

It nevertheless is true that policy frequently evolves in a none too tidy way out of a process that is partially deliberate and partially accidental. A good example of accidental policy development is provided by two of the suburban working class school districts in our study. As a byproduct of reluctance to close schools and ad hoc decisions made (or avoided) with reference to the problem of declining enrollments, the Alton and Weston districts, without desiring to, moved toward small, combined-grade classes in a number of their elementary schools.[3]

Of course, the business of calling attention to what is claimed to be the unusually loosely coupled, anarchic character of public schools as organizations and policy-making systems has by now become something of a growth industry (e.g., Cuban, 1975; March & Olsen, 1976; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Rowan, 1981; Weick, 1976). As a consequence, the mounting chorus of voices chanting this refrain may obscure the

fact that school districts actually vary in the degree to which they pursue (and in a few cases, in some ways approach) the ideal of rational policy making.[4] In the high socioeconomic status suburban districts in our study, their plentiful management resources and associated attitudes inclined them to assiduously pursue the rational planning model. Their policy development process for decline thus was characterized by:

(a) extensive data collection and analysis;

(b) considerable use of expertise;

(c) formation of numerous committees and task forces involving citizens and educators;

(d) numerous attempts to clarify and set educational goals; to establish policies and models for systematic and consistent responses to decline-related problems; and to develop and apply criteria for school closing decisions;

(e) extensive public discussion of the problems of decline and of alternative solutions for these problems.[5]

In many ways, the Northview school district epitomized the pursuit of the rational planning model by high status districts. As their superintendent commented, when they were contemplating the need to close a school for the first time, "the district had five task forces composed of high-powered citizens who studied aspects of the declining enrollments and decreasing revenue problems. These were attorneys and accountants, etc., highly qualified people. It would give you a hernia to carry out of the office all the materials that they prepared by way of reports."

By contrast, in the working class districts in the study, where management resources are scarce, policy development is more inclined toward political bargaining than rational planning. As a result, the process usually was characterized by:

(a) much less data collection and analysis;

(b) little use of expertise;

(c) fewer committees and less citizen involvement;

(d) fewer attempts to clarify or set goals and criteria;

(e) less public discussion, more inclination toward secrecy and suspicion;

(f) more inclination toward ad hoc and accidental policy development;

(g) more overt politics and bargaining.

Some of the differences between the upper-middle and working class districts in the study can be illustrated by briefly contrasting Northview and Weston. In both districts the superintendents argued that declining enrollments necessitated a reorganization of schools and grades in order to maintain needed flexibility for the proper grouping of children. In high status Northview, child psychologists and university professors were brought into board meetings to explain the importance of proper grouping. Extensive discussion of this subject, and analysis of enrollment projections under the existing arrangement of schools, convinced the Northview board, and most of the community, that a sweeping reorganization plan was necessary to maintain educational quality, even though it meant giving up the remainder of their neighborhood school system. (One elementary school already had been closed.)

In working class Weston, the case for proper grouping was presented much more briefly, with less expertise invoked, and the substantive merits of the idea received far less discussion and scrutiny. Instead, the discussion quickly shifted to the importance of somehow maintaining the existing neighborhood school system. When the Weston superintendent continued to try to frame choices in response to decline in terms of grade reorganization or regrouping, the bulk of the interested public, and some board members, viewed this as a coverup for what really was at stake: the demise of highly valued neighborhood schools.

While the reaction in Weston reflects a legitimate difference in values, it also reflects a difference in the importance placed on expertise and substantive analysis of educational policy questions. Thus, when school closings no longer could be postponed in Weston, the grouping issue still received little attention and the school board chose, from the alternatives before them, the plan which least altered their neighborhood school system.

Another example of the contrast in policy development approaches is the Alton school district. In this working class district, the only planning committee on declining enrollments was a small subcommittee of the school board itself, which met privately, apparently analyzed little data, and generally conducted itself with an air of secrecy and disdain toward curious citizens. While confidential discussions went on in all districts, citizens in the upper-middle class districts would not have tolerated a planning approach relying almost entirely on a secretive elite.

Although we found more overt politics and bargaining in working class districts, we do not mean to suggest that politics was absent

in the high socioeconomic status districts. Rather, it often took place, with more subtlety than in the working class districts, within the context of the "rational" approach. For instance, because of the complexity and ambiguity of the data and alternatives relevant to school closing decisions, these matters often were subject to debate and sophisticated "partisan analysis" (Lindblom, 1968) by the citizen and employee groups potentially affected. Moreover, conflict often broke out, particularly over the initial school closings in a district (as was the case, for example, in Northview's first school closing), when it became clear who the losers were likely to be. In this regard, we found that after the first one or two elementary school closings have taken place in a district citizens usually become more accepting of the idea that additional elementary school closings must take place and may not be as harmful as originally feared.

Particularly in high status districts, the use by school officials of at least the trappings of the rational planning approach helps to maintain the legitimacy of the decision-making process for most people, even though prospective and actual losers tend to be suspicious of the process. Sometimes their suspicions are well founded: As in many public facility closure situations, the data on alternative school closing possibilities often fail to indicate one clearly superior solution. In these situations, hints of political considerations and arbitrariness in the determination of decisions frequently make acceptance of the outcome especially difficult for the losers. As we show in Appendix D, the use of citizen advisory committees in the retrenchment decision-making process will not prevent these problems, and may even increase the skepticism of the losing factions.

The Problems of Large Urban School Districts

Although central office administrators in urban school districts typically attempt to follow a rational-technical model of decision making for school closings, the process--and especially the public participation phase of it--tends to be overwhelmed or circumvented by the fundamental organizational and political dynamics common in large urban bureaucracies.[6] All too often the actual school closure decision making in large urban districts seems to be characterized by incomplete information and analysis, blatant politics, and spectacular footdragging followed by precipitous and sometimes arbitrary decisions (e.g., Cibulka, 1982b; Colton & Frelich, 1979; Cronin, 1980). The flavor of this process in large urban districts is vividly conveyed by Metz (1981) in her account of the closing of the Andrew Jackson Magnet School, the decision for which took place a half hour after the first public mention of the idea. In a graphic illustration of the garbage-can theory of decision making (March & Olsen, 1976), Metz shows how this decision "could not in any sense be described as a rational solution to a single problem" (p. 147). She also demonstrates the vulnerability of special schools, such as magnet schools, which tend to be used as movable pieces or pawns to ameliorate system-level problems through symbolic actions.

Above all, school closing and retrenchment decision making in large urban school districts is characterized by problem avoidance and delay. Cronin (1980) reports that the bankruptcies in New York City, Cleveland, and Chicago were caused, in part, by the gross failure of all three school systems to make needed cutbacks. Enrollment in the New York City schools declined by 50,000 pupils from 1971 to 1975, but

few schools were closed and the staff was not cut back. Cleveland lost 63,000 students from 1968 to 1979, but postponed closing any schools and actually increased its teaching staff. Chicago's enrollment declined by 96,000 students from 1971 to 1979, but very few schools were closed although hundreds of mobile classrooms were removed from schoolyards (Cronin, 1980).

Similarly, in 1981 the Little Hoover Commission in California criticized the Los Angeles school district for not closing a single school despite having lost over 100,000 students in the previous eight years. And, in what Education Week (1982a, p. 3) characterized as "a belated attempt. . . to bring five years of stability to the system," the Minneapolis school board voted in March 1982 to close 18 schools, a quarter of the city's total schools. This action, taken in an attempt to reduce an anticipated $97 million deficit over the next five years, will require more than half of the district's students to attend different schools in the next school year.

Why should large urban school districts be so prone to delay on retrenchment? If anything, the massive and dramatic nature of their enrollment declines and fiscal problems would seem to demand prompter attention and action that the more modest problems faced by smaller districts. The answer, in part, as documented by Berger's (1982) case survey, is that urban districts are prone to face more opposition to school closings than non-urban districts. But why should this be the case? A complete answer requires that we examine the implications of a fundamental dilemma of cutback management.

Dispersed vs. Concentrated Cutbacks

The fact that there tend to be clear winners and losers in retrenchment policy making is, of course, the reason why conflict management is so difficult in decline. A way out of this difficulty might appear to be across-the-board or dispersed, rather than concentrated, cutbacks. But, there is a debate and dilemma associated with this option that has even found popular expression in the incisive social commentary of the "Doonesbury" cartoon strip. The twin horns of the "Doonesbury dilemma" are that, on the one hand, across-the-board cutbacks will in time weaken the entire enterprise (and possibly antagonize too many people) while, on the other hand, concentrated cuts involve painful surgery and are sure to galvanize vociferous opposition from the affected parties.

DOONESBURY
AND IF WE MAKE A 15% CUT ACROSS THE BOARD FOR ALL DEPARTMENTS..
WE'D HAVE AN OPEN REVOLT ON OUR HANDS.
THERE'S GOT TO BE A DIFFERENT WAY, SIMPSON. I DON'T THINK WE CAN AFFORD TO ANTAGONIZE SO MANY PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME..
WELL, SIR, WE COULD ALWAYS MAKE JUST ONE MAJOR CUT..
WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND, SIMPSON?
HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT?
I DUNNO. IS IT ANY GOOD?
GB Trudeau

In the short run, however, across-the-board cuts are quite attractive because they minimize conflict. But, as Behn (1980c) has argued persuasively, referring to the ultimate danger of bankruptcy and receivership, there are two fundamental stages in retrenchment:

> During the first, the small declines in resources combine with the inability (or unwillingness) to recognize the long-run trends to produce short-run solutions: across-the-board cuts and deferred maintenance. Eventually, however, reality is forced upon the organization--either by its leaders who explain it, or by outsiders who place strict conditions upon their continued support. Only once the organization is in this second stage can the serious business of managing the decline begin. And it is in the interest of the manager (or, at least, in the interest of the manager who plans to stay with the organization over the long term) to get past the first stage as quickly as possible (Behn, 1980c, p. 615).

To get past the first stage of decline, leaders must understand and explain to their constituents and organization members the opportunity cost of not cutting back (Behn, 1980c). Otherwise, everyone will focus on the obvious, immediate costs of the cutbacks themselves.

As Zerchykov (1981) notes, one of the reasons the professional advice literature almost universally urges a planning and consensus-building process is to seek agreement enabling focused cuts rather than eventually debilitating across-the-board cuts. But the empirical literature shows that the rational planning approach rarely produces such agreement. Thus, it initially appears that conflict can be minimized only by sacrificing the more rational course of action in favor of dispersed cuts: "If school managers make focused cuts they will . . . be faced with intense organized political opposition but no countervailing organized support" (Zerchykov, 1981, p. 175).

How then can school authorities "do the rational while accommodating the emotional (i.e., political)?" (Zerchykov, 1981, p. 7). Our findings suggest the following conclusions: First, there may be a viable route in the initial stages of decline via hidden or dispersed cuts or costs. This is the way to minimize conflict or--to harken back to our opening text in Chapter I--to "conceal the parts of the

school system in the bushes." A grade reorganization (i.e., the creation of new grade configurations such as K-3 and 4-6 schools) may enable a reassignment of students postponing the need to close schools. Also, the existence of large school buildings may permit the maintenance of sufficient numbers of students in buildings to postpone closings for a while despite excess space.

Second, particularly in upper-middle class districts, the employment of a planning and consensus-building process can be valuable for maintaining legitimacy with the majority of citizens. It also can help attain a measure of agreement, especially among staff members and citizens who are not hurt by the cutbacks that are selected. But such a process should not be oversold. Too much of the literature is filled with misguided optimism raising false expectations, such as this advertising blurb for a how-to-do-it book by Bussard (1981):

> Closing a school can divide and embitter a community or it can be the choice of all when school enrollment declines. The difference is the degree of planning and openness on the part of school officials and parent/citizen groups which deliberate over changing enrollment patterns.

Our findings are consistent with Zerchykov's conclusions based on his literature review: The rational planning and consensus-building approach rarely, if ever, results in a school closing decision that is the "choice of all." But school officials need not be deterred: A major conclusion of our research is that the politics of school closings is far more a "divide and conquer" than a "plan and agree" process. The secret of school closings, sensed by some school officials, is <u>concentrated cuts judiciously targeted</u> to minimize the likelihood of the formation of resistance coalitions. There always will be resistance to school closings, but if it is isolated it will have

little effect. Because citizens in other neighborhoods may not mind seeing someone else's ox get gored they will be unlikely to join forces with the losers unless they believe their neighborhood school soon will be in jeopardy also. Thus, the lack of active, organized support in favor of school closings is not the obstacle to school closings that it might appear to be: A countervailing force is not needed against weak and isolated opponents.

Significantly, rather than being the artifact of Machiavellian tactics, the isolation of opponents to cutbacks will tend to occur spontaneously when participants truly understand the opportunity costs of not cutting back. For instance, we found in the Karlin school district that the opponents of a school closing were unable to garner support either from candidates running for the school board or from a proposed district-wide referendum on the closing of their school. The closing affected only a small segment of Karlin's population and there were many voters who were more concerned about the district cutting back on expenses. In the Leland district the opponents of a decision to close two neighborhood schools did succeed in petitioning for a referendum to keep the schools open by raising taxes. But the referendum was defeated by an overwhelming margin. Moreover, in the same election candidates supporting the board's school closing decision were elected to the board over candidates opposing the decision.

This analysis shows that small school systems, as most suburban ones are, enjoy an important advantage over large systems in the matter of school closings. Small districts usually only need to propose closing one or two schools at a time. In large city school systems plagued by decline, however, it is not uncommon for school officials to propose closing a large number of schools simultaneously. As

Narver, Weatherley, and Elmore (1982) show in the case of Seattle, this creates the likelihood in cities of coalitions of affected neighborhoods mounting significant opposition to school closing proposals. This difference between large and small school systems provides part of the explanation for the greater difficulties city school districts are having in closing schools.[7]

The Seattle case actually is not entirely representative because Seattle is atypical of large cities in America today in that it still has a very large middle class population. The high level of management skills in Seattle's population doubtless contributed to the remarkable political mobilization by citizens reported by Narver, Weatherley, and Elmore.[8] The more typical pattern in large cities, which does not require such a high order of sophisticated citizen involvement, can be inferred from Cronin (1980) and Cibulka's (1982b) assessments of the politics of urban school closings.

Retrenchment Politics in Urban Districts

Cronin (1980) reports that, "everytime the [Chicago School] Superintendent proposed closing a building, a delegation of parents, often led by an alderman or helped by school employees, would storm the Board of Education and cause such a furor that the proposed closing would be shelved" (p. 4). He concludes, from his appraisal of the New York City, Chicago, and Cleveland cases, that the principal reasons for urban school bankruptcies are:

(1) It is very difficult and unpopular to raise property taxes for city schools.

(2) It is very painful to close down individual school buildings, especially in cities where custodial unions have substantial strength and often assist city political leaders with election campaigns.[9]

> (3) It is very tempting to try to "finesse" a deficit by engaging in short term borrowing with tax exempt municipal bonds for just as long as the rating services and banks will allow (Cronin, 1980, p. 15).

Cibulka's (1982b) study of ten cities helps to flesh out the details of the political dynamics suggested by Cronin. Cibulka's data show how and why urban school board members are less inclined to close schools than are their administrative staffs. This inclination springs from (1) the political orientation of urban school board members toward short-term pressures from constituents, (2) the fact that constituents emphasize claims of equity and program quality more than economy and efficiency, and (3) the difficulties retrenchment or decremental decision making presents for the creation of winning coalitions in school board voting (Cibulka, 1982b, p. 29). Since the second and third points relate to the first, the important thing to emphasize here is the evidence that Cibulka presents about the greater inclination in recent years for urban school board members to take a <u>delegate</u> orientation (i.e., "do what your constituents ask") rather than a <u>trustee</u> orientation (i.e., "do what <u>you</u> think is best for the whole school district") toward their representational role on the school board.

Cibulka notes that, as a result of a number of forces, many urban school board candidates in the 1970s were elected or appointed to represent a particular constituency or point of view. Some city districts, such as Atlanta and Milwaukee, even changed their laws to allow for the election of board members by areas within the school district rather than at-large. These developments, as they were intended to do, have made many urban school boards more representative

of, and responsive to, segments of the public. As a result, large city school boards have increased the tendency they already had to be more politicized, and to have more board members with political ambitions, than is typically the case with school boards in smaller districts, where board members are more likely to serve mainly out of a sense of civic duty. When these conditions in urban districts are coupled with the political clout of unionized custodians and educators, and their ability to provide needed campaign support for the election of board members and other local politicians, a situation is created in which it is very difficult to get agreement to make the painful cutbacks essential for the long-run financial stability of urban systems.

As if these problems were not enough, because large and urban school districts usually are more socially heterogeneous than small and sub-urban districts, school closure decision making is more likely to be complicated in the former by racial desegregation issues. As shown in articles on school closings in Education Week (1982a, 1982b, 1982c), thorny questions arise as to which schools to close in what neighborhoods, with what immediate and long-term effects on racial balance, and how to equalize the amount of busing that different racial groups will face. Because these issues are hard to resolve satisfactorily, they add to the conflict surrounding school closings and may prompt lawsuits which delay or block school closing decisions.

Conclusion

To summarize the analysis in this chapter, a tension exists between the professional advice literature on the management of decline and actual practice. Research shows that the professional advice literature

is misguided, at least so far as conflict management is concerned, and that certain kinds of school districts are more likely than others to depart from the advice. Upper status districts are more inclined to follow the rational planning and consensus-building strategy, but it seldom enables them to avoid conflict. Significantly, however, it does provide a sense of legitimacy for the policy-making process and tends to produce results that appear more rational than the ad hoc, accidental, or dilatory policy making which seems characteristic of working class and urban districts. The political and organizational circumstances common to large urban school districts usually overwhelm efforts at a rational planning approach and make it very difficult to get agreement on the focused cuts necessary for real cutback management. The delay and temporizing about retrenchment which result exacerbate the already serious problems large urban school districts face. By contrast, because of differences in their political and organizational circumstances, small and suburban districts tend to be able to make focused cuts without excessive, harmful delays, though some, of course, fail to do so.

Our analysis calls attention to basic problems of democratic governmental and structural arrangements affecting the way the political process operates. In a very large sense, for school district as well as municipal government, "The crux of the retrenchment problem," as Levine, Rubin and Wolohojian (1981, p. 627) note, "comes down to a fundamental trade-off. . . centralize [authority] and limit representative and responsive government [thereby facilitating decisive cutback management], or leave authority more or less fragmented but open to interest group access, limiting the ability of government to prioritize

and target cutbacks. Either way, something of value will be sacrificed." As we have observed elsewhere (Boyd, 1975), this fundamental trade-off involves the tension between democracy and efficiency.

It seems clear that the most serious consequences of declining enrollments have been felt in large urban school districts, where delay in action on the problem has contributed to program deterioration, fiscal strain, and even, in a few cases, to bankruptcy and receivership. The latter cases have not only damaged the legitimacy and credibility of urban school boards in general, but have led to an actual reduction in the scope of control and powers of the affected school boards (Cronin, 1980). Declining enrollments are, of course, only one of the serious problems facing large urban districts, but Cronin (1980) argues that a lack of decisive action in this area was instrumental in pushing New York City, Chicago, and Cleveland into bankruptcy.

Considering the gravity of the problem, one may still wonder why urban school officials would be so slow to act. The heart of the problem, as Rubin (1980) reveals, lies in the nature of the urban political process and the usual structure of incentives facing urban politicians, which discourages prudent fiscal management. Rubin emphasizes that politics works on a short term, exhchange system, with politicians allocating resources in return for political support. Cutbacks threaten the political exchange process by removing slack resources and new uncommitted funds. Since both cutbacks and new taxes are political liabilities, politicians, as Rubin (1980, p. 621) notes, may "satisfice" by:

> (1) encouraging new revenue sources such as federal grants or greater support from the state or other local jurisdictions; (2) denying there is a problem, and delaying any cuts, except by attrition or deferred purchasing, maintenance, and equipment replacement; and (3) increasing borrowing to provide current services and capital projects for which they may take political credit. The administrative component of this stragegy may involve [various methods of "creative financing" and] hiding deficits. . . . These responses may result in large, planned deficits in operating budgets. As long as these deficits are obscured, they may be politically preferable to the combination of cutbacks and new allocatable resources.

What seems needed, as Rubin contends, is a restructuring of the urban political incentive system (1) by making it hard to conceal deficits and (2) by providing new, inexpensive political resources to substitute for those now being allocated in the exchange process. Since urban school districts are susceptible to the same political problems found in urban municipal government, Rubin's recommendations are applicable to both arenas.

We shall reserve further comments on the implications of our findings for the concluding chapter of this report, where we will draw together the main themes that have emerged from this study.

NOTES

1. In Part 2 of Appendix C, Hentschke and Yagielski argue that inflation is a far more significant cause of fiscal strain than declining enrollments.
2. Vivid case study examples of this proposition are provided by Morgan and Wofford (1977) and Poster and Gotti (1982).
3. Of course, small, combined-grade classes can be defended as desirable educational arrangements, if appropriate groupings of students can be made. In these cases, however, they were merely a means to the end of keeping neighborhood elementary schools open, and the grouping of students was increasingly a matter of chance rather than intention. To their credit, the superintendents in both districts called attention to the educational implications of the choices their school boards were making.
4. The ideal of rational policy or decision making, as March and Simon (1958) and others have shown, is of course entirely unattainable.
5. The range of alternative solutions considered, even in high status districts, tended to be narrow. See Boyd (1982b).
6. Characterizing urban school politics as "closed system, privatized politics," Iannaccone (1979) notes that citizen participation often occurs <u>after</u> decisions to close schools and focuses on the implementation of the transfers of students.
7. The long and impressive record of the Department of Defense in closing large numbers of military bases <u>at the same time</u> (Behn & Lambert, 1979) seems to contradict the proposition stated here. However, there are a number of factors specific

to the Department of Defense case which may account for the lack of resistance coalitions in Congress to the multiple base closings: First, the multiple base closings are spread across many states, not confined to a single community area, so the multiple impact is not visible in one locality. Second, the affected citizens consequently are not able to directly form coalitions themselves, but must rely on Congressmen, the most influential of whom, Behn and Lambert report, the Department of Defense studiously avoids offending. Third, military bases do not provide any direct local services. Fourth, most personnel on military bases that are closed do not lose their jobs, but are transferred. Fifth, the Department of Defense will back down on proposed closings if local Congressmen ask the right questions (Behn & Lambert, 1979, p. 17). Sixth, and finally, the Department of Defense has a long range planning approach which leads to planned obsolescence, deterioration, and phasing down of activity at bases to be closed. Thus, when closing finally is announced these bases compare poorly to the other bases.

8. One example of the sophisticated citizen participation in Seattle is the ingenuity and legal expertise employed to block the closing of five schools in 1976 on the grounds that the school district had failed to file a required environmental impact statement (Narver, Weatherley, & Elmore, 1982). Another example of enterprising citizen resistance to school closings is found in Portland, Oregon, where upset citizens in one area of the district are attempting to secede from the district, a legal possibility they discovered under the state's 1957 school reorganization act, which is primarily concerned with school district consolidation (Education Week, 1982c, p. 11).

9. Cronin (1980, p. 19) notes that, "In smaller cities the school custodian is viewed as a low status hired hand. In large cities, the custodian-engineer is a feudal chieftain. . . an entrepreneur, a small businessman. . . who has a stake in keeping the schools not only clean but open."

CHAPTER IV

Tension and Transformation in School-Community Relations: Decline, Neighborhoods, and Neighborhood Schools.*

The policies adopted in response to declining enrollments in most of the fifteen school districts we studied have led to a period of tension and transformation in school-community relations. There has been a movement away from the once sacrosanct "neighborhood school" concept. Perhaps not surprisingly, this movement generally has been accompanied by a complex symbolic politics regarding the meaning and maintenance of neighborhood schools and neighborhoods. At the same time, there are signs of a narrowing of the role and functions of schools and a concomitant strengthening of the articulation of local schools with other local community organizations.

In this chapter, we examine these trends and associated problems. Since it is not feasible, within any reasonable length limitation, to discuss the relevant data on all fifteen districts, we shall look in depth at the problem of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools by closely examining three of the districts that vary significantly in the clarity and definition of their neighborhoods. Then, in concluding, we will outline the changing relationships and roles of schools and local community organizations that seem to be emerging.

Deeply compounded into the present fears and anxieties of school board members and parents, and no less interlaced with the perspectives

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*This chapter was co-authored by Peter W. Wood, William L. Boyd, and Dennis R. Wheaton.

of professional educators is a set of ideas centering on "neighborhoods" and "neighborhood schools." Neither the fears nor the problems of declining enrollments can be understood if we fail to see the complex ways in which these ideas are embedded with other social realities. The existence of "neighborhoods," in other words, is not a conceptually isolated doctrine, but a part and parcel of the transactional concerns of people pursuing concrete ends: parents attempting to gain a proper education for their children, homeowners worried about property values, school board members governing a system of seemingly run-away costs, and administrators presiding over the dissolution of minor empires. Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion of these things is by letting the participants speak for themselves:

> 'We bought this house nine years ago and one of our big concerns was having a new school just three blocks away where the children could walk. Then they told us that they're going to close our school and two of my children are going to be bussed one place and the other to another school. That's when I got mad." The woman speaking puts down her coffee and explains how she had organized petitions and protests and finally ran for a seat on the school board and won. But, by then her school was already closed.
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> A superintendent leans back in his chair: "Yes there was a lot of 'save-our-school' hysteria, but then they saw their kids getting a good education anyway, even if it was at a different school and it all died down. This time, when we close another school, we're going to hopefully beat them to the punch. We're going to name the school right off and isolate the opposition."
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> - - - - - - - - - -
>
> Another superintendent in another district lays his hands on the table: "Well I always said that our first closing was a quick-and-dirty-job. And of course everyone complained that there was so little discussion and so short a time to discuss the alternatives. So this time we're going in with more lead time. They have three years and nobody can say it's coming as a surprise."
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"For a while," says the board president, a doctor in his early fifties, "my daughter was going to a new school every year. In six years she went to five schools, just because they kept redrawing the attendance boundaries. That's when I first ran for the board."
"Have you every held any other public offices?"
"No, Well wait a minute. I'm president of our neighborhood association."
"What does it do?"
"Well we're mostly fighting a change in zoning. A contractor wants to put a multi-family dwelling in the neighborhood."

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"No, we never went for neighborhood schools in this district," says a school administrator. "For a while we were just growing like topsy and we just kept adding on fairly large, centralized buildings."
"Was the growth too rapid for different areas to gain a sense of their own identity?"
"Yes. In a sense, the district doesn't really have any neighborhoods, so there's no need for neighborhood schools. There's a difference between the village and the 'suburbs,' but all the schools are pretty close together."

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"Yes I think there was a group that organized against closing any schools at all. It was called something like S.O.S. -- save our schools -- and they went around giving everyone the impression that it really <u>was</u> <u>their</u> neighborhood school that was going to be closed," says a woman who served on a school board through one closing. "We just threw their petition out, because you couldn't tell why any of those people signed, or what they had been told."

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"So," says the board president, in a meeting on setting criteria for the selection of another elementary school to close, "let me just summarize the list so far. We want to maintain the quality of education. We want to minimize bussing. Neighborhood schools should be kept open, if we can. We still want a minimum of 24 pupils per classroom. Maybe we want resource rooms. Did I miss anything yet?"

Background

The "neighborhood school" was one of the master concepts of the era of school expansion. Not everyone embraced the idea, but there was a time when it was a reasonable expectation for each neighborhood of sufficient size to want the school board to put an elementary school within walking distance of most of the children's homes. A neighborhood school meant a positive, proprietary attitude of local residents towards their school system; it meant greater safety for children and less anxiety for parents; and it meant a higher quality education. Learning among peers from the local neighborhood, stability in classroom composition, and the relatively greater responsiveness of a local school to specific community needs and expectations were all thought to enhance learning. But most of all, a neighborhood school was a matter of morale. It symbolized the identity of a community and the respect which the district as a whole was willing to pay to one of its individual parts. And it became, in turn, more than a place for children, since it was valued for its own sake, for its latent as well as manifest functions (Alford, 1960).

Administrators, school board members, and the public could all agree that neighborhood schools were a good thing. If there was disagreement over just which neighborhood was next to get a school, this was no fault of the overall plan. Somewhat more troubling were all those children who from year to year were moved from one school to another as official attendance areas were redefined to accommodate a growing population. Did this mean that the boundaries between neighborhoods were changing? Of course, it really did not: No one could expect attendance areas and actual neighborhoods to be exactly the same.

This particular problem, however, presaged a greater one to come. When declining enrollments through the mid and late seventies reached the critical stage in which districts found that closing schools was their best alternative, there, before everyone, stood their official policy of maintaining neighborhood schools. Closing a school would undoubtedly have raised one or another form of community concern and opposition from some quarters no matter what the context. After more than a decade of promoting "neighborhoodness," however, that concern had a ready-made ideological content. The decision to close one school could invariably, and perhaps rightly, be read as an assault on the identity of a neighborhood. All those conveniences lost, property values perhaps in jeopardy, the quality of education threatened, and the very mechanism that led to the consolidation of neighborhood sentiment eliminated, the neighborhood was certain to rise up and defend itself. And its verbal means of defense were likely to be the rationalizations the educational community itself had promoted.

In these circumstances, school board members and school administrators might have had second thoughts about their ultimate preference for neighborhood schools over some other principle of geographic distribution. In most cases, however, the officials did not change their minds (or rhetoric) so much as they changed their definitions. Neighborhood schools, though certainly less emphasized, are still considered a worthy goal in many districts. Only instead of being a part of the plan for future buildings, they now are part of a guideline for cutting back with minimal damage to the educational system. The question about neighborhoods that is now asked has the following sort of logic:

"How do we maintain educational quality and keep the greatest degree of 'neighborhoodness' in our school system, while closing our erstwhile neighborhood schools in the interest of economy and efficiency?"

Behind this debate stands confusion about a key concept: Just what is a "neighborhood?" How did we come to be so committed to it as a basis for school size and location that, even after serious retrenchment has begun, we are unwilling to give up the idea of "neighborhood schools"?

The following discussion is aimed at demonstrating (1) the way in which the idea of "neighborhoods" has entered into the political consciousness of Americans participating in public education and (2) how school closings affect, and are affected by the clarity of neighborhoods.[1] After discussing the research methods employed, we will examine the term, "neighborhood," in its common usage. It is not simply a descriptive term; it operates as a special kind of symbol and like many symbols, it has multiple and contradictory meanings and lends itself to political exploitation (Edelman, 1964). Second, we will examine the diverse way in which "neighborhoods" are identified and discussed, and the implications of this diversity for school closings, in three school districts in the suburbs of Marasmus. Finally, we will return to the subject of school policy. Are the ambiguities and misunderstandings implicit in this term worth the trouble? Should school districts, in an era of declining enrollments, continue to plan their futures on the basis of neighborhood identities?

Method

A major part of the overall research effort involved the observation of school board meetings, with particular attention to the policy-making and conflict management processes associated with decline-related questions. In observing school boards, conceptual approaches drawn from anthropology as well as from political science and sociology were used. Indeed, some members of our team of investigators, including one of the co-authors, were recruited from anthropology departments precisely because we wanted to employ their ethnographic skills in identifying non-explicit, but persistent, cultural themata in the public interactions at school board meetings. It was by this means that the "problem of neighborhoods" came to our attention early in the summer of 1979.

Subsequently, our field researchers were sent to interview school board members, school superintendents, and citizen participants in school closing and decline-related discussions. In part, these interviews were intended as an opportunity for our anthropological researchers to further explore the cultural themata identified in the observation of school board meetings.

In sum, the data for this chapter were gathered by the following means: First, the school board meetings in the three districts were observed from June 1979 through May 1980. Second, in the summer and fall of 1979 the three school superintendents and all the school board members in the three districts were interviewed, using a set of ten open-ended questions that probed problems and solutions considered and adopted in response to declining enrollments (see Appendix B). The "problem of neighborhoods" was approached by means of the following

question: "Can you tell me anything about the different local neighborhoods in the district, and whether they have responded in different ways to the pressures of declining enrollments?" Third, in the fall of 1979, short follow-up interviews were held with each of the superintendents, specifically focusing on the definition of neighborhoods in their districts.

Early in 1980, we expanded our pool of informants. Citizens who had spoken at board meetings and who had mentioned the term "neighborhood" or any of its cognates ("neighbors," "our area," etc.) were approached and asked, "Would you be willing to talk briefly about the neighborhoods in your community as part of a broader study of the relations between school districts and community organization?" These citizens were divided into two categories: those who had spoken at board meetings as representatives of various community organizations (the PTA, neighborhood associations, band parents, etc.) and individuals who had not claimed to be speaking for any group. Thirty-six of the forty-seven persons in the former category agreed to be interviewed, while eleven of the twenty-eight in the latter category were receptive.

To get a better representation of people from all the neighborhoods that had been identified, we next went door-to-door in the vicinity immediately surrounding the schools serving these neighborhoods and interviewed people at random. We interviewed thirty people in each of the two districts in which distinct neighborhoods had been identified. In the third district, which by consensus of our respondents lacked distinct neighborhoods, we interviewed twenty people at random, scattered over the entire geographic area of the district. They also

agreed, with remarkable unanimity, that the district lacked distinct neighborhoods.

Throughout the various interviews described above, we used the set of ten open-ended questions as a point of departure for probing further the problem of neighborhoods and neighborhood schools. Thus, what follows in this analysis is drawn from loosely structured, but intensive interviews with the participants in the drama of declining enrollments and their management.

Neighbors and Bureaucrats

"Neighborhood" is one of those words that passes unobtrusively through the ordinary speech of ordinary Americans. Like other terms in which we convey our folk sociological distinctions, it has quite a high degree of semantic flexibility. A "neighborhood" is a place inhabited by some, more or less, distinct set of people. Yet the specific kind of place-to-people relationship it means seems to vary almost as much as the different kinds of "places" that occur in American life. Thus, depending on circumstances, voting districts, blocks, streets, access areas for shopping malls, ethnic clusters, housing stock of the same relative age or value, zoning districts, or attendance areas for schools can all serve as separate discriminative criteria for defining a "neighborhood."

The built-in eclecticism of this term has a direct political and public policy implication. Any attempt "from above" to administer a governmental program to define local units, runs a risk of opposition from those who see the program as violating or undermining neighborhood integrity. Even supposing that the administrative units are set up to

take practical account of pre-existing "neighborhood" type boundaries, a potential opposition can always commence from a different definition of what constitutes a neighborhood. From the administrator's view, the problem looks something like this:

1. People define neighborhoods and there is no overarching set of rules that says they all have to employ the same set of criteria. Thus, the social units which members identify as "neighborhoods" can be constituted on widely different social bases, and two or more neighborhoods, constituted on different bases, can even overlap.
2. The lack of consistency among neighborhoods as <u>self-defining</u> units makes them inappropriate units for bureaucratic administration. Neighborhoods, insofar as they arise independently of bureaucratic policy implementation, are cumbersome. Each would require treatment on a separate bureaucratic basis. There would be a consequent duplication of effort and waste and the net result would be administrative inefficiency.
3. Bureaucratic administration on the basis of consistently-defined, homologous units is much preferable, and in fact, may be the only possible way of effectively administering complex policies for large units. The units bureaucratic administration creates for its purposes will often be "like" neighborhoods in that they will also recognize a place-to-people relationship, and once established, these units may be taken to heart by the residents, combined with other aspects of "neighborhood"

identity, or serve as the nucleus of a new identity.

4. The residual problem is that other definitions of neighborhood, running at cross-purposes to the bureaucratically-consistent ones, are always available as a basis for political opposition. Previous self-defining neighborhoods may find that the new boundaries intersect theirs and that this intrusion is unwelcome or, as an alternative, variantly-defined "neighborhoods" can emerge as self-conscious units of political action almost overnight. A community can "discover" its "neighborhoodness" as a consequence, not as a cause, of opposition, and this new identity can them become a powerful symbol of political interests (Suttles, 1972).

From this perspective, the ambiguity of the term "neighborhood" is not an accidental laxity in American vocabulary, but a functional part of the ongoing relationships between governmental bodies and local populations. Government aims, in some circumstances, at achieving local cooperation, and local populations aim at achieving a fair influence over governmental policies. The omnibus "neighborhood" concept thus is one of the foci in which disagreements are articulated and through which compromise or resolution sometimes occurs.

This kind of debate over "administrative units" vs. "local neighborhoods" could not take place without the idea of neighborhood, in all its manifestations, carrying a fundamental positive connotation. No American is offended by the suggestion that he and other Americans live in "neighborhoods" (as many would be by the suggestion that they live in "ghettos"). The word suggests friendliness, informal cooperation,

some degree of face-to-face interaction, a social unit of the size in which most of the participants know or could know most of the rest, and a bond of trustworthiness based on the thought that others' experiences and interests cannot be terribly removed from one's own. To call some group together as a neighborhood is not to invoke the paramount values of American life, but it does call on feelings that are significantly viewed as "close to home." They are values whose strength perhaps arises from the implicit closeness of personal self-interest with a form of public-spiritedness (the neighborhood's interests).

Three Community Profiles

The data we shall discuss are drawn from case studies of three Marasmus suburban school districts -- Empire, Mesick, and Buckley. In most respects, as Table 4-1 suggests, these districts are quite similar; yet, as we shall see, they possess some striking differences in the definition of their neighborhoods. Each of the districts has a current enrollment between eight and nine thousand students, kindergarten through grade 12, and each is centered on, though not coterminous with, a township of the same name. Each district, moreover, is a creation of the post-World War II period of consolidating school systems. Each serves a suburban area that underwent roughly the same kind of demographic and cultural changes during a period of rapid population growth. Each responded by a vigorous building program financed by public bonds and by a steadily-increasing rate of taxation on real property. And each district is governed by a seven-member school board elected on a non-partisan basis from the district at large, not as representatives of component areas.

Table 4-1

Selected Data Reflecting Change in Size,
Occupation, Income and Education of Population

		Empire	Mesick	Buckley
Population Size:				
1960		20,000	12,000	15,000
1970		31,000	24,000	35,000
Occupation: Proportion of total employed persons in the following job classifications:				
Craftsman, Operatives or Laborers	1960	46	44	44
	1970	31	27	39
Professional-Managerial	1960	30	28	30
	1970	35	44	34
Median Family Income:				
1960		$ 7,765	$ 7,774	$ 7,740
1970		14,640	14,800	13,360
Median Years of Education:				
1960		12.2	12.0	12.2
1970		12.6	12.9	12.6

Source: United States Census Tract Data.

In all three cases, the townships experienced rapid population growth (and somewhat less rapid commercial growth) during the period following World War II and continuing growth, although at a declining rate, to the present. Despite the continued rise in absolute population through the 1970s, school enrollments began to level off in the early years of the decade, and then, in two of the three cases (Empire and Buckley) entered a precipitous decline. The reasons: a combination of smaller families among recently wed couples, who were also choosing to have children at a later age than had been common earlier. The enrollments of children in private and parochial schools relative to public school enrollment held nearly constant. Thus, the public school enrollment drop was due directly to a declining birth rate among residents, not a net population decline or a migration out of the public school system.

Empire is the farthest removed from downtown Marasmus of the three communities and has preserved some of its identity as a farming area spreading out equidistantly from a compact village at the crossroads of the main north-south and east-west roads. This gives Empire the appearance, on the map, of breaking neatly into four equal quadrants. The residents acknowledge these divisions and use them to organize certain projects -- but the areas covered are not, all by themselves, neighborhoods.

The most dramatic post-World War II changes in Empire came about when the Chester Corporation, with headquarters in Marasmus, located extensive facilities in Empire township in the early 1960s. This brought a large increment of the total increase in population, and more importantly, it brought a new kind of population. The farmers and people who worked in local businesses and professions were now met

with large numbers of university educated, white collar scientists and engineers, with substantially greater incomes than the community had seen before. Unlike Mesick and Buckley, however, Empire remained relatively self-contained. It is not one of the big commuter suburbs for Marasmus. Its scenic river shore, edged with expensive summer homes for the wealthy, as well as a public park, helped complete the community's image of itself as something distinctly outside the city, a place unto itself. This image is sustained, but Empire, in fact, has been drawn closer and closer to Marasmus by the development of major circumferential highways, and the conversion of local roads to highway standards. A more "cosmopolitan" sort now lives in Empire along side those who prefer a local identity. As we will see, this enters into Empire residents' ideas about neighborhoods.

Mesick is the most affluent of these three communities, and one of the most affluent suburbs in all of greater Marasmus. Like Empire, Mesick was a farming community, but it was also a railroad depot. Today, its farms have disappeared completely, but the former village, at the crossing of two rail lines, is kept up and tries to capture a historical flavor with nineteenth century store fronts and old-style lamp posts. The main streets of the village of Mesick can show off some very well kept 19th century mansions. The bulk of the population, however, is spread out in recent single family house subdivisions.

Mesick is close enough to Marasmus, and has such direct access to the city via the circumferential highways, that a great many of its people are daily commuters. Some offshoots of the city's main industries, however, have made their own move out to the Mesick area, so that the commutation goes both ways. Mesick is not entirely built up

yet, though an increasing proportion of its growth is in more marginally attractive areas, industrial parks, and in the form of townhouses. And, as we mentioned, it is the only one of these communities whose school district has not yet had to face any drastic decline, though its enrollments have finally begun to fall.

Buckley is also within a close orbit of the city. It hosts a half-dozen or more shopping centers and malls, a variety of small factories that feed products into Marasmus' major industries, and one large plant that employs over 8,000 workers. Nonetheless, most Buckley people work in the city.

Unlike Empire and Mesick districts, the Buckley school district is a composite of several communities. Besides Buckley township, the district takes in all of Morely township, and parts of Piltdown and Essex.

Morely is something like Empire used to be -- a small village in the midst of a farming area -- although suburbia has bitten into its end nearest the city. The part of Essex in the Buckley school district is a heavily commercialized strip with some apartment complexes and a few side streets with single family homes. Piltdown is among the most fashionable of Marasmus' suburbs, but only a small, relatively less affluent fragment of it falls within Buckley.

Neighbors and Neighborhoods

Despite the similarities between the districts, the ways in which residents of Empire, Mesick and Buckley define the neighborhoods of their communities show some dramatic variations. As we look at these, we must be prepared to ask how these variations correspond to differences in administrative policies in the districts.

Empire

Empire, as we noted, divides along major transportation routes into four quadrants. During the period of Empire's most rapid growth, the school board developed a plan to treat each of these quadrants as a separate attendance area for elementary schools, with a fifth area located in the village of Empire itself. In the event, some quadrants had more students than others to start with, some grew quickly, and one which was expected to grow remained mostly undeveloped. Empire had just completed an elementary school in this no-growth quadrant the year that they discovered their enrollments warranted closing an elementary school.

The closing raised the familiar cries about neighborhood schools, but "neighborhood" in this case became entangled with resentments between the Chester Corporation technocrats, with their wealthy subdivisions north of the village, and the farmers, villagers, and merchants who made up the bulk of the remaining population. When the school district disclosed a plan for closing a school which included a provision whereby the children of one of these relatively affluent areas would be bused into the village, an angry letter appeared in the village newspaper from a woman who lived in the "northern" neighborhood. She explained that the desirability of keeping their "own" school in her part of the district was that it kept their children from associating with the "wrong" kind of children.

This letter became a cause celebre among old-time villagers. Every person in Empire we have talked with knows about the letter, even if they haven't seen it. And most of them bring it up in spontaneous reply to any question about Empire's neighborhoods. The letter serves, at once, as a "proof" that the Chester Corporation employees "look down"

on the natives, and that this attitude is somehow geographically based. People in Empire--at least those who live south of the area in question--thus recognize one major geographical boundary in their community, and if asked to identify Empire's neighborhoods, will sketch this north-south dichotomy.

There are some problems here, however. First, the area north of the village is quite old. The new "Chester" subdivisions may have brought the bulk of the population, but the houses on the river predate the Chester facilities and there are still some fine old farms in the area. Not only that, some of the families that live in the village have relatives who have moved to the new houses in this area, and it is evident that the "northern" neighborhood is not just Chester Corporation people, nor is it "the better side of town." Is it a rough-and-ready approximation of the place in which the Corporation newcomers are most likely to live? This we asked, and were usually told, "no," by people who had lived in Empire long enough to remember what it was like before Chester Corporation moved in.

Their explanation verged on the ineffible. The wife of a retired mechanic explained that the people "in that area" were "always" different. It wasn't that it was inhabited by some particular ethnic group, nor was it dominated by members of one church or one religion. They weren't all wealthy, or poor, or the same in any other way. They simply were perceived to be distinctly "different" from other people in the community, and this difference came out in the form of certain attitudes of superiority, and a kind of annoying complacency (that prevented them from getting involved in the fight to save their own school until it was too late). Asked if she thought this was due to

the "place" itself, the woman's answer was again "no;" it was the way the people who lived there "were."[2]

If there is some sense in this woman's description, it comes in the underlying implication that, in Empire, neighborhoods are psychological realities. No amount of gerrymandering attendance areas for schools or such like, according to this view, could possibly affect the identity of the district's neighborhoods. It might alter their relative status, give a blow to one's pride, raise the self-esteem of another, but the units themselves would remain intact.

A lawyer in Empire asserted, however, that Empire's neighborhoods would eventually be wherever Empire's schools would be, and that is why he had proposed, as a member of the school board, to close down successive schools in such a way as to keep a school open in all four quadrants, including the quadrant where few people lived, and which would therefore require extensive busing. Is this "social engineering" concept of a neighborhood school consonant with the notion of lasting neighborhood units?

On the surface it is not, since it suggests the units will change to fit even a minor change in bureaucratic circumstances. But there is more to the story. Other members of the Board, and other members of the community, argue that this lawyer proposed his four-quadrant neighborhood school plan not because he believed in the future of new neighborhood areas in Empire, but because he was trying to save the elementary school which he had attended, and which was now the most likely candidate for the next closing. He was, in other words, offering a duplicious rationalization to defend the pride of his old neighborhood.

We cannot know the lawyer's real motives, but can suggest that the fact that other people interpreted his behavior in this fashion demonstrates the pervasive attachment that Empire citizens believe exists between a person and his neighborhood, and how firmly they hold to their antireductionist definitions of "neighborhoods." Neighbors of one sort or another may come or go, but in Empire, neighborhoods remain.

Mesick

In Mesick we ecountered a very different sense of "neighborhoods." Mesick people had what might be called an egocentric neighborhood complex. They believed that neighborhoods existed, but each person had his own distinct catalog of Mesick's neighborhoods, and even these were little more than extrapolations from superficial geographic boundaries, like the railroad lines. Moreover, there was no insistence that people in any one area were somehow "like" each other, or that any area differed from any other in matters separate from property values or recency of housing development. If neighborhoods are a place-to-people relationship, in Mesick, some of the possible places were clear, but the "people" were out of focus, and the relationship, therefore, was indeterminant. Neighborhoods, as such, remained a positive conception, but an undifferentiated dimension of the community in the minds of board members and citizens.

Mesick is perhaps an upper-middle class melting pot. It has experienced rapid growth and a high rate of transiency in its population. Nothing has happened to solidify any one part of it, though there is a free-floating readiness to recognize such identities should they arise. Mesick people have "neighbors" instead of "neighborhoods," and people answer questions about neighborhoods by asserting, with a

certain amount of pride, how well they get along with such-and-such people on their street. These are affinities that might form the basis of neighborhoods if any Mesick residents began to feel less well treated than people in some other part of Mesick. On the other hand, "neighbors" are unlike a "neighborhood," in that a homeowner can choose to exclude some families from his definition for no reason beyond the fact he doesn't know them. "Neighborhoods" seem to carry the implication that everyone in a contiguous space is a neighbor, regardless of familiarity and personal dislikes.

This relative absence of "neighborhoodness," despite "neighborliness" fits rather well with Mesick's political character. Of the three school districts, it is the one with the most internally standardized set of political opinions, and with the least amount of oratory and debate. At Board meetings an atmosphere of professional dispatch is maintained, with the underlying implication that everyone agrees over the really fundamental issues, which appear to deal with the ultimate value of private property, holding down taxes, and promoting a solid educational program aimed at producing students prepared for college.

The last and most noteworthy point has to do with one of Mesick's past policy decisions. Unlike the other two districts, Mesick never went greatly out of its way to build neighborhood schools. Instead it expanded and re-expanded its central elementary school, and built only a few other, rather large, elementary schools at the edges of the district. The lack of related propagandizing in the past in favor of neighborhood-like attendance areas undoubtedly has something to do with the absence of clearly defined neighborhoods in the district.

Buckley

The Buckley district provides the clearest instance of an internal diversification of neighborhoods. Parts of the township of Buckley are pointed out as "Italian," "German," and "Black" neighborhoods. Some of the more recent tract developments with housing of relatively uniform age and value are designated by the name of one of their streets. Two neighborhoods are referred to by their proximity to two separate shopping centers. The fragments of Essex and Piltdown included in the district are marked off from their own townships simply by physical distance--either business districts or open farm country separate them from any adjoining neighborhoods. Morely people identify their own village of Morely as a different "kind" of place from the "frantic commercialized highways" of Buckley. Morely also divides itself between the new town-house and apartment complexes on its Buckley fringe and the older, more rustic parts with their dairy and sheep farms. Finally, of the three school districts, Buckley is the only one in which "neighborhood associations" have come into existence. These associations are often, in fact, based on a single residential street, and are formed, as alluded earlier, as special purpose groups to defend existing zoning regulations against variances that would permit multi-family dwellings from being built in their vicinity.

Buckley is also the district that most explicitly adopted the "neighborhood school" concept during its 25 year history of consolidation and expansion. Morely and the part of Essex included in the district came into the merger under a "gentleman's agreement" that each would always have its own school. Today over fifty percent of the area included in the district is "undeveloped," and no schools are located

in these areas. The remaining five K-6 schools, both of Buckley's middle schools, and its two high schools are situated in Buckley township. The locations of the middle and high schools, it is safe to say, are not perceived as a consequence of pre-existing neighborhood boundaries. Each of the elementary schools, however, was built to accommodate a growing housing development. The only elementary school Buckley has closed so far was a sixth Buckley township-located building in a development that failed to grow at the anticipated rate.

The communities that make up the Buckley school district clearly do not lack for a sense of being divided into neighborhoods, as is the case in Mesick. And, unlike Empire, the "neighborhoods" are more than just hypothetical groupings of people on the basis of assumed attitudinal affinities. Instead, the neighborhoods are seen as interactional outgrowths of other kinds of common interests. The "Better Buckley Bureau," for example, is a blue-collar, largely Italian, tax-resistance association centered in the older neighborhoods of Buckley township. It has taken a consistent stand each year in favor of school budget defeats and school closings. Its membership has not yet had to face a situation, however, where either of the two elementary schools located in their own neighborhoods would appear as a likely candidate for closing.

When Buckley did close one school, the residents in that neighborhood managed to elect their spokesman to a term on the Board, and his often-reported protests centered on the "unfairness" of the Board's having excluded the schools in Morely and Essex from the school closing decision-making process. The Buckley board decided, in 1980, to begin proceedings for another elementary school closing, but this time, significantly, the Board voted to include all of the district's

remaining elementary schools in the list of possible targets.

The conclusion must be that although neighborhoods in Buckley may have different kinds of origins and be sustained according to the principles as heterogeneous as location within a separate township, domination by a particular ethnic group, proximity to a housing development, or attendance to a common school, all neighborhoods in theory must be treated as homologous and equal units. To treat any one of them as deserving more or less of what is offered to any other, is to risk vigorous public protest in Buckley.

Social Action Based on Neighborhood Apperception

Many suburban school districts faced the problems of rapid growth in the post-war era by anchoring their expansion programs to the idea of neighborhood schools. Administrators, of course, were frequently aware that outside the cities the "neighborhood" and the "neighborhood school" were rather "soft" concepts. The term "neighborhood" pleasantly resonated gemeinschaft sorts of inter-personal cooperation and friendliness and the "neighborhood school" in turn sounded like a secure little place where parents could place trust as well as children. The suburbs, in contrast to the cities, often had only vaguely defined neighborhoods, but this absence of rigidly drawn ward and block boundaries was no hinderance to the basic suburban neighborhood school policies.

In fact, the relatively low degree of pre-existing neighborhood differentiation is part of what made the policy so administratively attractive. In cities, neighborhoods often were empirical facts that had to be reckoned with. Building a new school aimed at an attendance area that cut across ethnic or class neighborhood lines was an invitation for both political and intra-school disciplinary problems. The

shifting of attendance areas among existing schools was and is, in the urban district, a matter for finesse. In the suburb, however, neighborhoods generally were an incipient phenomenon.

Many people clearly were not satisfied as isolated families on a street of other isolated families, but growth had come so suddenly that it was difficult to sort out deeper feelings of, or reasons for, solidarity. In Mesick, where growth continued even after its cessation in surrounding communities, people had little time to form lasting associations. In 1978, over half the students in Mesick's fifth grade classes had spent at least one year attending schools in a different district. If nothing else, this residential mobility has been enough to slow down whatever tendencies Mesick might have towards the formation of clearly acknowledged neighborhoods.

Mesick of course, did not pursue a policy of building neighborhood schools. In districts where the problems of residential turn-over were not quite so great, however, the policy had various attractions. First, it could ease the way for expensive building projects by suggesting that these projects were in accord with the natural development of the community. Second, it offered the occupants of incipient neighborhoods a means of completing their social unit. A school was a concrete symbol of the identity of a group that was not even sure it was a group. Finally, the "neighborhood school" sounded as though it were something accommodating itself to something that was already there--a neighborhood--but allowed the administrators an almost free hand to draw attendance boundaries.

What underlies all three of these attractions is the complex relation between attendance boundaries for schools and neighborhood

self-perception. This is a subject that deserves a detailed historical and comparative treatment we are unable to provide in this current study. Yet we have accumulated evidence that suggests that the relationship is a prominent factor in the politics of school closings.

The key to this relationship is what we might call "neighborhood apperception"--the condition that participation in the activities centered on a neighborhood school broadens and deepens people's sense of being part of a neighborhood, and their sense of belonging. In turn, it creates even stronger loyalties to the school itself (cf. Alford, 1960). Neighborhood schools give rise to neighborhood PTA's; they provide neighborhood playgrounds; they become, on occasion, meeting places for other local organizations; and they serve, in many instances, as the first place where parents meet other parents in the "neighborhood" who are not immediate "neighbors."

Administrators who created school attendance areas more to accommodate "the numbers," as several administrators in our study have phrased it, than to respond to any perceived community pressures for having "our school" built, inadvertently created the conditions by which those so-called "neighborhood schools," became "neighborhood schools" in fact. The sarcasm which one administrator privately directed toward a group opposed to closing a particular school is typical of the tendency to underrate the effects of the earlier policy: "Everyone talked at the time as though 'our school' was inviolable. They could agree to close a school, but not the one their own children attended. And this was true even though their children may have attended three different schools over the years as we kept adjusting attendance areas." In many cases, administrators now treat the idea

of "neighborhood schools" as a propagandistic device whose usefulness has passed. The trouble seems to be that too many people took it seriously in the past and continue to do so.

This is a point where our study of public perceptions in the three suburban districts indicates that some school officials may be systematically misreading certain signals. While some board members have dropped the language of "neighborhood schools," for others this represents a continuing, though beleaguered ideal. The general parent-public also, by and large, continues to feel that the best elementary education is the least bused education. Apart from school closing issues, the e feelings are expressed again in the general building utilization reorganization plans now before many district boards, and in the various decisions boards must make over the return of handicapped children to the "least restrictive environment." Maximization of building utilization sometimes means a return to the pattern of a child being moved through several buildings in the period of just a few years, and it frequently calls for stepped up busing. Both stimulate wistful discussion of how important it is to have children attending school as close to home as possible. The "mainstreaming" discussions involve remarks of the same tenor: According to one board member in Buckley, "every student we can bring back into our schools brings us that much closer to keeping our schools in our neighborhoods." Part of the idea here is that mainstreaming of handicapped children ought to be some small gain on the problem of declining enrollment.

The common administrative misreading of this discussion comes from the once correct assumption that suburban neighborhoods were a positive idea, but a vague reality. School expansion and building programs gave

that vague reality a substance, and the public is well aware that to close schools is likely to return more than one neighborhood to its earlier fringe existence. For instance, Empire has closed a total of four elementary schools, and under its current plans, in a few years, will shut down a junior high, the last school of any kind in Empire village. The village undoubtedly will suffer least from not having a school, since it is the only "neighborhood" in Empire that has a local identity and various forms of organization over and above its schools. Empire, however, also plans to close another elementary school sometime before 1984-85, and here the Board faces a serious problem. All closings until now have left one school in each of Empire's four quadrants. The next closing will inevitably mean that one of these supposed "neighborhoods" will no longer have an elementary school. The Empire superintendent says this is not really a problem, since the four quadrant idea was simply a Board contrivance of four years back. "The numbers" will determine which school is to be closed.

Empire residents, however, express very guarded opinions about this prospect. The popular attitude, as one woman put it is, "It's quiet now, but there's going to be a lot of noise. We people down here have taken a lot over the last few years, and I don't care how small the classes get, we need our own school!" In Empire, as we have seen, neighborhoods are not defined in any clearcut, overt way. Perhaps this is all the more reason why residents are reluctant to see their only visible demarcation, the neighborhood school, disappear.

This is not to say that suburban neighborhoods have moved in the direction of the same kind of "territorial" definitions of urban neighborhoods or that the simple passage of years has brought

"neighborhoodness" to fruition after its almost accidental implementation in the fifties and sixties. All that has happened is that schools often have served a vital role in helping to stabilize a precarious identity. To close schools has proved as difficult as it has partially because a precarious identity produces more anxiety than one that is totally secure.

The Idea of Neighborhoods in the Management of Decline

One can imagine that many administrators wish they had never heard of neighborhood schools. However, the Mesick district, due to its especially rapid growth and the high transiency of its residents, avoided both the development of a suburban neighborhood system and the building of neighborhood schools. As a consequence, the prospects are favorable for relatively easy management of declining enrollments. Over the next five years, they expect to close one K-6 elementary school and to reorganize several grades into different buildings. But, even under the existing scheme of attendance areas no student can reach Mesick High School without having gone through at least four separate buildings. Perhaps, as one administrator there observed, no one in Mesick can have much loyalty to any particular building, and there consequently is little reason to anticipate problems from the public as the district adjusts to declining enrollments.

At the other end of the scale are districts (not included among the three we have discussed) where the neighborhood school idea has been taken to its practical, if not logical, limits. Buildings have been designed for as few as 250 to 300 students, with the result that many of these facilities will have to be closed in the face of shrinking

enrollments. In these instances, boards and administrators indeed have something to learn from the shortcomings of earlier policies.

The lesson that many draw from this is that facilities should be planned solely with regard to their educational cost-effectiveness. The "neighborhood school" in this light was a costly venture into making education a partner in some forms of community cultural development. Educators thought that they could accommodate the worthy principles of neighborhood participation in schools, and gain the free side benefit for themselves of having a modular system of buildings in which demographic fluctuations across the district could be evened out through attendance-area adjustments. But the neighborhood school approach, according to this view, backfired. Now many districts are left with small, under-utilized facilities and no real choice other than to attempt to cut losses by shutting them down.

The difficulty with this course of action, however, lies in the tendency of school officials to assume that the "neighborhoods" evoked by schools will vanish as easily as they were created. Whether we like it or not, the fact is that neighborhood schools have become the focus of more or less <u>real</u> neighborhoods. This is not to say that educators always have been unaware of this outcome. As one of our superintendents observed, "you try to build up staff and community identity with schools, but then you have to close schools and say, in effect, that all schools are alike." Still, even when community identity is clearly at stake, educators do not hesitate to put the quality of the educational program first, as Walker's (1977) account of the closing of the Pelham school in Southern Ontario poignantly illustrates.

This attitude, of course, is understandable due to the professional role of educators and the fact that they serve in school districts, not community districts. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that by devoting more attention to the significance of the school-neighborhood interface educators might be able to make better decisions about which schools to close and how best to minimize the disruptive effects for the affected neighborhoods.

As we have seen, the term "neighborhood" connotes an extremely broad array of people-to-place relationships. The array within particular communities, however, is not random or inexplicable. In our three cases we have two extremes: Mesick, where people have neighbors, but neighbors do not add up to neighborhoods, and Buckley, where a continuum of commercialized to rural settlement patterns includes a series of definitely bounded, named neighborhoods. In between we have Empire where residents attribute a psychological reality to the "neighborhoodness" of certain areas, but are unable to attribute any specific commonalities (e.g., ethnicity, class, religion) to the neighbors. What these cases suggest is that the pattern of neighborhoodness can be isolated and understood as part of the micro-culture of particular communities.

It may well be that those patterns are intrinsically related to other structural features of the communities. The relatively wealthy, cosmopolitan and highly mobile residents of Mesick perhaps have less need to invest in interpersonal relations with their neighbors than do the blue-collar and service workers of Buckley, who are, as a whole, less prone to residential mobility during their child-rearing years. Yet, these are questions that we need not necessarily resolve to gain

insight from the perception that the root idea of neighborhoods varies among different suburban communities.

Recognition of variations in the patterns of suburban "neighborhoods" is a first step in developing policies appropriate to specific situations of declining enrollment. Although such recognition will offer no dramatic, across-the-board solutions to the problems of community opposition usually faced in school-closing decisions, we think that administrators should spend more time familiarizing themselves with the social links between each school in their district and each school's neighborhood. These social links, more than the quality of education per se, seem to be the real source of contention when a district chooses to close a "neighborhood school."

Most administrators have a fair intuitive grasp of the degree to which different schools are "embedded" in neighborhoods. The most entrenched neighborhood schools are often the older buildings of the district, ones which some of the current board members may themselves have attended and which, on grounds of upkeep alone, might seem attractive targets for school closings. Thus, many administrators would concur with the paradoxical observation of one of the superintendents in this study that, "It's easier to close a brand new building than one that's forty years old." Old buildings simply have had more time to become enmeshed in the ramifying social links between school and neighborhood. Other aspects of school-neighborhood relations, however, are subtler, more difficult to perceive, and perhaps worthy of more formal investigation by those considering possible school closings.

To help administrators identify these social links between school and neighborhood, this analysis suggests several lines of inquiry to

be pursued in addition to the "facilities use studies" usually carried out in preparation for planning declining enrollment policies:

1. Transiency. As shown in the case of Mesick, two of the critical factors that weigh against the development of neighborhood allegiances in a community are (a) the frequency with which residents move and (b) the degree to which these moves are regarded by residents as a normal function of life in the community. School administrators should have relatively easy access to statistics on the transiency of families with school-age children within each school's attendance area. The broader transiency rates, including residents without children, however are also important. An area with "old timers" who remember the community's past may be more capable of evoking a neighborhood identity than an area with a relatively homogeneous age grade of adult residents.

2. Involution. Administrators are often tempted to equate the "neighborhood" aspect of a neighborhood school only with its explicit community center functions, such as the space used by evening square dance classes, or community choirs, and book-discussion groups. These things are undoubtedly important, and are not to be overlooked in assessing the "neighborhoodness" of a school, but they are not the whole picture. An equally important factor is the degree to which the attendance area of neighborhood school coincides with what might be called the "attendance

areas" of other institutions. If the congregations of the local churches, or the personnel of local businesses, and so on, are drawn exclusively or predominantly from the same geographical area served by the school, the school may well be part of an "involuted" neighborhood, one in which most of the residents' needs can be met by services available within the neighborhood. In such cases, allegiances to neighborhood schools might have relatively little to do with the "community center" aspect of the schools themselves, and more to do with the fact such schools are functional components in "closed" community systems. In this study, Buckley provides an example of a district in which such closed, involuted neighborhoods are common.

3. Boundaries. In some cases, the internal boundaries of a community are so explicit that anyone with any social contact with the residents will recognize them. In suburbia, however, clearcut boundaries of this sort seem relatively infrequent. As we have seen school attendance areas themselves sometimes form the template around which other more enduring social boundaries can be drawn. The two questions school administrators must be prepared to ask are: a) Have we recognized the important social boundaries apart from those we have drawn ourselves? b) To what extent have the boundaries of attendance areas gained a significance beyond their original importance? To answer

these questions, we suggest a very eclectic approach. Attention should be paid to where "neighborhood associations" draw their own boundaries, and to whether the overall pattern of such associations seems to coincide with geographical boundaries, divisions of income, ethnicity, or something else. Are neighborhoods coincidental with small-scale "block associations" or are they more or less diffuse regions on the district's map? What do people with vested interests in who lives where say about these communities? Real estate agents, politicians, and merchants may be able (even without being explicitly asked) to give a much better reading of these matters than school professionals.

Having identified the specific links that tend to make a neighborhood school an integral part of a neighborhood, an administrator is both forewarned and forearmed. The schools that it will be least disruptive to close, if only neighborhood factors are considered, are those with neighborhoods high on transiency and low on "involution," tradition and clarity of external boundaries. The difficulty for school officials, of course, is that a great many other factors also must be considered in determining which schools to close. The school closing decision-making process inevitably seems to involve an assessment of both economy-efficiency and political factors (Boyd, 1979; Iannaccone, 1979). Thus, in some cases there will be a strong argument for closing schools with strongly developed neighborhood ties. Probably the best that school officials can do in these instances is to: (1) call attention to, and cooperate with, other neighborhood/community

institutions and organizations that may be able to pick up or compensate for some of the community center functions provided by the school to be closed; and (2) try to devise or identify social activities or tasks that could involve neighborhood people and that logically could be set in motion quickly, in connection with working out arrangements for the revised attendance area and receiving school, as a means of speeding the creation of new neighborhood social networks to replace those that will be lost.

Conclusion

It is clear, of course, that any consideration of closing a neighborhood school is sure to elicit some degree of community opposition, even from neighborhood areas that are very weakly defined. But there is also a good deal of evidence that school closing controversies tend to die down, often rather rapidly, after the school closing decisions are made. This seems to be particularly true after the first few school closings, as people within a school district appear to become reconciled to the idea. But even if the political, as opposed to the organizational, impacts of declining enrollments are rather slight, it is still clear that neighborhoods that have lost schools have been hurt. To the extent that school officials anticipate, but wish to avoid, intense controversies over closing neighborhood schools, they may want to consider Gately's (1979) proposal that neighborhoods that lose schools be given a temporary reduction in their school taxes as compensation for the costs imposed specifically on them in the interest of the welfare of the whole school district.

In districts hard hit by declining enrollments it is appropriate to ask what the future should be for the policy of having neighborhood

schools. Most of the school superintendents we have talked with feel that declining enrollments do not so much create educational problems as they do social, political and economic problems. As one of our superintendents put it, "the consequences of declining enrollments are not necessarily bad educationally, if people can just recognize that they must return to what used to be in many suburban districts -- a more rural, consolidated type of school attendance area arrangement."

To move in this direction, through more busing of students and the reorganization of the grades found in school buildings (e.g., from grades K-6 to K-3 and 4-6 schools) is to abandon the concept of the neighborhood school. Many districts are doing this and it appears to be quite a reasonable response to the problems they face. But since "neighborhood schools" are by now such a sacred cow in our society, it is not surprising that many school administrators prefer not to be explicit about what they are doing; it is easier to avoid the subject or just redefine what they call a "neighborhood school." Consequently, it is likely that debates about school reorganization alternatives will continue to be blurred by the ambiguous use -- both by administrators and citizens -- of the symbols of "neighborhoods" and "neighborhood schools."

There is an alternative to this, however, particularly in small school districts. In the Northview school district in the suburbs of Chicago, school officials have addressed head-on the reality that the concept of neighborhood schools will not be workable in their setting in the 1980s. As a consequence, they have advanced an alternative value scheme in place of the neighborhood school concept: that of the benefits of a more closely knit, better integrated community and school district as a result of a school organization that divides age groupings but not

neighborhoods. Thus, with resourcefulness, school officials may be able to successfully invoke new symbols and values to replace old ones no longer viable in contemporary circumstances.

Whether one is explicit about it or not, the movement away from neighborhood schools to "consolidated schools" is likely to have highly significant and probably positive political consequences: Rather than identifying narrowly with the interests of neighborhood schools, parents will be more able to see the broader interests of the whole school system or at least their portion of the consolidated system. One of our superintendents observed, for example, that, "It used to be a neighborhood that was affected by a school closing. Now we have to talk district-wide. This is a major change. . .so in addition to feeling a money pinch, there has been a revision to district-wide thinking." This kind of redefinition of the schools' community should reduce factionalism and aid in the development of more unified public support for the schools, a vital consideration in this time of adverse demographic and economic trends.

Another promising sign of positive adjustments to the changing social, economic, and political environment comes as a somewhat unexpected consequence of declining school systems: There appears to be a strengthening of the articulation of local schools with other local community organizations. This has occurred in several ways. First, as some school districts have been forced to dispense with the educational "extras" of drama clubs, team sports, many forms of musical groups, and other forms of extra-curricular activities in their attempt to balance budgets, they have actively sought the help of other community organizations which could provide substitute activities. This

has happened both through direct district efforts and through the organized activities of parent groups. Thus, local public libraries are stepping up their services to public school students as schools cut back on librarians and the consequent instruction in library skills available during school hours. Also, in the Chicago area, local park districts are beginning to take over the organization of volunteer-run team sports activities, band groups, and the like at the elementary school level. In one school system, for example, the park district is providing band uniforms with the elementary district school colors along with music training, as well as providing cheerleader instruction to maintain school spirit in team sports, such as basketball, now run by the park district itself. The affective symbols of local affiliation remain but are now supported and shared by different community organizations.[3]

Second, the closing of neighborhood schools means that buildings designed for group activities become vacant within residential areas. The park districts, libraries, and other community service institutions, such as religious instruction schools and public health and welfare organizations--which have their own fiscal constraints and could not otherwise afford such useful buildings--lease the rooms, cafeteria facilities, gyms, playgrounds and athletic fields of the closed schools to provide the expanded services they can offer. The school districts, of course, benefit from the leasing in balancing their own budgets. The other local institutions can expand their services into the residential territories of the communities they serve on a more decentralized basis, and at a fraction of the cost of constructing such facilities on their own.

Third, school districts themselves are more actively cooperating with one another in exchanging information on adjusting to retrenchment, in combining supply purchases to receive the volume discounts an individual district no longer can get, in setting up or expanding already existing cooperatives to meet and share the burden of special education needs, and in a few cases soon, perhaps, to merge small adjacent districts.

Fourth, as difficult decisions such as school closings and program cutbacks are made, and as they are publicized in the community press, community awareness of the requirements and constraints of local public schools is enhanced--as is a consciousness of the social services provided by the schools. It is entirely possible that the current difficult period in many declining suburban school systems may result in stronger, but more partial, educational institutions linking the local school to the wider society through stronger ties of the schools to other community organizations.

These trends are significant for local community institution building in education in the suburbs, and indicate substantial movement in the direction of an aggregation model of educational reorganization proposed by Morris Janowitz (1969):

> In the past, public school systems have been hostile to other institutions and agencies that have offered educational work--church groups, community organizations, settlement houses, and welfare agencies. Until recently, the school has almost purposefully separated itself from these agencies and at times has been openly antagonistic to them. Under the aggregation model, the school is more supportive of outside agencies with educational programs (p. 107).

While Janowitz is speaking here of the slum school, some of the major points of his aggregation model are being realized now in some suburban

schools under the strains and constraints of retrenchment.

One would hesitate to call this development an example of the "smaller is better" ideology in action; there clearly are significant costs as well as benefits involved. Yet, it is interesting that some of the goals of American educational institutions finally may be achieved not in conditions of expansion, which traditionally have been thought to provide opportunity for institutional success, but in these strange times of forced accommodation to shrinking student bodies, tight public finance, and lowered expectations for public education.

FOOTNOTES

1. In regard to the latter point, Peshkin (1980, p. 232) observes that "Since consolidation compels a community to be conscious of its social boundaries in relationship to at least one other community, it enables us to study how these boundaries are defined. In general, the closing of a school provides an occasion for the pursuit of community-oriented inquiry."

2. In our study of the fifteen school districts we have been repeatedly struck by how pervasive, and yet how vaguely based, is the view that neighborhoods and schools other than one's own have different and somewhat undesirable kinds of families and children. This attitude seems consistent with Suttles' (1972) concept of the "defended neighborhood," and with his observation that neighborhoods need not be highly homogeneous in terms of population to become known in terms of stereotypes. See also Hunter (1974).

3. To the extent that the activities replaced are run by part-time volunteers, it is of course likely that the professional quality of the activities may suffer.

CHAPTER V

Perceived Consequences of Decline*

In light of concern about possible deterioration in the quality of American public schools, an important issue is whether declining enrollments are prompting a decline in educational quality in school systems. As a part of our research, interviews were conducted with school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents in each school district to learn their perceptions of the overall positive and negative consequences of decreasing enrollments. Part of this large body of data collected concerns the positive and negative effects of declining enrollments on the quality of educational services being delivered to students.**

While such interview data are always colored by the subjectivity of informants' personal perspectives, and require more objective methods of verification, the mutual corroboration of developments by different categories of social actors in different kinds of school districts and communities serves to confirm the reality of these developments insofar as they are understood by participants.

Representative examples of informants' responses to various questions about the consequences of decline on the quality of education in their school districts are presented here in a manner designed to let the actual participants' words tell much of the story. The interview data gathered in these districts enable us to look at the effects of declining enrollments on educational quality along the following dimensions:

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*This chapter was co-authored by Dennis R. Wheaton and William Lowe Boyd.

**See Appendix B for a description of the interviews.

1. What are the effects of consolidation of schools and programs on educational service delivery?

2. What are the educational and social advantages and disadvantages of having fewer children in the schools?

3. What are the social consequences of retrenchment for students?

4. What are the relationships between mandated educational programs and school contractions?

5. What are the consequences of decline for teachers and the teaching profession?

6. Is the overall quality of programs and education harmed or enhanced as a result of decline?

It will be apparent, after a reading of the interview responses, that a major effect of decline and retrenchment has been the reduction or elimination of many social services, enrichment programs, and extra-curricular activities offered by the schools. This is a conclusion supported by other data we collected in addition to our interviews. Whether respondents believe that these changes in public schools are detrimental, neutral, or beneficial to the overall functioning of public education depends largely on what functions and goals of schooling, and what relationships of local schools to the surrounding communities, they hold to be of central importance. Beyond this issue, which accounts for much of the ambivalence in responses, our data clearly point to harmful effects on the quality and morale of the teaching profession.

1. What are the Effects of Consolidation of Schools and Programs on Educational Service Delivery?

A common major structural consequence of contraction in many districts is the consolidation of facilities and classes to maintain core instructional functions. This is an effect which participants often find as salutory, but it runs directly counter to arguments for

the preservation of neighborhood schools in the face of declining enrollments. In a very real sense, then, all arguments for the efficacy of consolidation of schools, students, and programs in coping with declining enrollments are also arguments against the preservation of neighborhood schools. The benefits of consolidation, unsurprisingly, often are used by district officials to counter community protest when closing of schools is being discussed in board meetings and public hearings. Such discussion is, then, a major element in the continuing debate over theories of education, the proper function of schools, and the underlying tension between localistic and larger community concerns. The key point, say those who favor programs over neighborhoods, is that consolidation enables school districts to maintain quality education during contraction. The following comments by school district participants and observers illustrate these points.

In Weston, a principal said:

> If you go back program-wise, declining enrollments have provided us an opportunity to have subject area classrooms and have made proper teaching situations easier. . . . The children's needs are met equally as well, if not better, with special services because of consolidation.

Mrs. Little, a board member in Weston district, stated that her district had been able to maintain:

> a very high level of education. Going back to our [illegible]ep of turning two K-8 schools to K-6, that grouped enough students to still have an algebra program for the seventh and eighth grades--whereas with less we could not have maintained it. Groupings have helped. As I say, we have been able to maintain quality.

In Camden, the superintendent and a board member stated that if there had been any change in the quality of education during their period of decline, it had improved because of the benefits they were

able to realize by consolidation. Mrs. Singer, a Camden parent, said she thought there had been no adverse effects of decline on the school district's educational program; if anything, it had improved because, with more children in a building after closing schools, there was more flexibility in programming and no longer any combined-grade classes.

Although Oakton board member Grossman saw very negative consequences for school-community relations resulting from school closing decisions, he said:

> In education though, I don't think it's done a thing one way or another. It may have even helped the education program because we are now dealing with larger numbers of children in each building. There is enough span of ability with several teachers per grade to group the children by their ability; whereas in a situation of only one class per grade per school, one teacher has to handle the whole span. Smaller is not necessarily better in that case.

A principal in Oakton District, Mr. Kinsky, said that:

> . . . trying to run schools of less than 200 kids is a very expensive proposition. For example, if a building reaches 200 or less enrollment, and it can hold 500, you still, in most cases, have a principal, a custodian, a librarian--this is all drawing on the kids' resources from the whole district.
>
> Too, we can offer kids a wider range of activities by combining two super-small schools. There is more variation in the programs. The biggest advantage is financial. Everybody wanted their neighborhood school open, but they were getting to 200 or less and keeping them open would be deleting services.

The Northview superintendent, Dr. Lloyd, said that the vast majority of that community saw the central issue as program preservation rather than neighborhood schools, and understood that neighborhood schools had to be closed to preserve programs. Board member Goldberg had the following to say on Northview school closings:

> The children adapted rapidly. General agreement is that the education is better from several points of view. First, instead of having one and one-half or two classes per grade (at neighborhood schools), the district now has five or six classrooms per grade. This is better for the placement of

> children, either because of teachers or peers. And as the population goes down this will continue to give flexibility to the school system. Also, it provides a more professional situation for the teachers; they are better able to exchange ideas, for example. Previously the teachers did not have that much contact with each other.

Although she said that the staff reduction has hurt her and other junior high teachers, a Northview teachers union leader stated that:

> . . . the closing of three separate feeder schools, the combining. . . has been good for the children. . . . We can group by ability, by personality, bad combinations can be split. Also you have more ability to match teachers with children. . . . There were also factions from different schools. With the four schools there wasn't the continuity in teaching methods. Now that all the children are in the same building, the teachers help each other; they can follow the curriculum better. The kids come better prepared and have a common background.

And a Northview parent, Mrs. Kaplan, said that the reorganized district system is much stronger educationally. It can provide more educational materials, more teachers with different perspectives and interests to answer a child's needs. More sharing between faculty strengthens the art and music programs, as well as others. A bigger school, she stated, allows separation and diversification of peer groups when they need it.

When asked if the process of adjusting to decline had created any alterations in their goals, Ms. Victor, a Greenwood board member, replied:

> The process hasn't but the result has! We now have two schools, 1,000 students and all in a position for the administration to almost have a private school control over the staff and student achievement. If we alter a program, we should be able to have data on the results within three months. Now the board can know if all of the fourth grade teachers are using the same programs and the results from that program. Previously, one principal would not cooperate in coordinating curriculum between the two elementary schools.

Greenwood board member Burke said, of the effects of decline on educational service delivery,

> I think it's nothing significant. It's too early to say (July 1981). It is my hope and my belief that the program will improve through consolidation. The ability to place kids with different teachers, for example. For significant numbers of kids, there will be a benefit in moving around. I don't see any disadvantage.

But a Greenwood teachers union leader gave a more negative assessment of the effects of consolidation on her district when asked if she saw any positive consequences of declining enrollments:

> No, I don't see anything positive. I think it will work out, that there will be a smooth transition. I don't see in a district of three schools that you'll have anything positive in closing a school. I think you begin to inbreed and don't have enough variety--in teachers, children. This school is very different from the school we are moving to. This school had a wide variety of socioeconomic classes, from the very poor to the very rich, migrants and Vietnamese. The other school has never had such a wide variety of children. Also the administration's approach to our school has always been different in that when the curriculum is sent down, we followed it. The other school didn't. We always followed the rules--for example, closing times. This awareness of differences has already created hard feelings between the two staffs. . . .

Several Karlin district informants mentioned the disrupting effects of continual reorganization, including the closing of one school and frequent boundary changes. A Karlin parent said that the neighborhood school concept has been lost, which was a "substantial loss to the children."

The Leland teachers union president said that, although the reorganization of the district by closing buildings and consolidating classes had meant frequent moves and much more uncertainty for the teachers, the consolidation of the seventh and eighth grades at one school has been beneficial for the academic program at that level. Classes are larger and more electives can be offered. But the other

Leland teachers union leader interviewed said that the result of these changes has been loss of flexibility because, with larger classes, it is more difficult to treat students individually and it becomes harder to move children around to different teachers according to their needs, since there are fewer classes and fewer teachers.

2. What are the Educational and Social Advantages and Disadvantages of Having Fewer Children in the Schools?

There is disagreement among our informants as to whether having fewer children enrolled in the school districts is by itself an advantage or disadvantage in delivering quality educational services. A major difficulty in separating out the benefits and liabilities of lowered enrollments in the classrooms is that some, but not all, of the Chicago area districts are so dependent on state aid (property-poor) that their income drops as rapidly as the enrollment. Although a Smithville principal said that by late 1980 his district had not experienced any major impact from declining enrollment, he described well the dilemma of educating fewer children in a property-poor district:

> Yes, decline would enable teachers to give more individual attention to kids--that would be especially helpful for kids with low reading levels due to their socioeconomic level and life experiences. It means smaller class sizes although it also means less money and eventually fewer teachers. It basically comes down to less money--you have fewer kids, you lose state aid--there's no advantage except maybe some room for a learning center or a science center.

Supt. Howe of Smithville reported that, up through the 1980-81 school year, decline had some advantages for the delivery of the educational program in his district because they had not reduced staff and the pupil/teacher ratio had dropped from 30/1 to 26/1. But they can no longer afford that and are making moves to change that ratio. The strategy is to keep it at 31/1 across most grade levels, although he would like to keep it lower.

Several principals interviewed saw as a positive consequence of decline the fact that fewer students allowed them to give more individual attention to children, to know the parents better and understand individual problems better. A Trenton school board member who teaches in the Chicago public school system agreed that this was true of teachers also: "I think, too, when we have low enrollments, principals and teachers can get to know the kids better--a definite asset. Kids feel closer to each other and to the administrators and teachers."

The Trenton teachers union president, Mrs. Hill, made the following comments:

> Class sizes are smaller--this year is one of the smallest I've had, only 24. With reduction of staff there is less resource personnel. There were once three first and three third grade classes here [her school]; now we're down to two of each of those grade levels. We do have support personnel, but they have to cover the entire district, and with declining enrollment, it's hard to bring on more resource personnel. For example, there is one librarian teaching the first through third grades in all four buildings. There are two music teachers in the district--one band teacher and one for general music.

Some parents and educators, then, see smaller classes as being potentially better places to educate children, if the decisions made in coping with contraction do not obstruct the creation of smaller classes and continuance of support personnel. In the midst of giving a very negative assessment of the consequences of decline in her district, the Oakton teachers union president commented that as a result of decline:

> . . . discipline problems have decreased because with fewer students there is more space and a better physical situation. We had very crowded schools here in 1968--classes in the corners of the library and hall. There were 1,400 students at Virgil (Jr. High)--now there are less than 600. There are no longer those huge masses of bodies taking up volume in the halls and in teachers lounges, which makes life easier.

In Weston District, which was also severely overcrowded before the onset of declining enrollments, the first stages of decline were a relief. In a 1977 interview, Weston Supt. Scott said that because his district was quite overcrowded during the growth period years, the decline in enrollment was only then beginning to become a serious problem for them. At one time they had 16 mobile units, in 1977 they had 10, and after 1978 they would have only 7. With the beginning of enrollment decline they were able to create for the first time art and music rooms in all or most of the schools. In a 1980 interview, Supt. Scott pursued this theme:

> On a positive side, curriculum-wise, it has permitted us to have a bit more flexibility within the curriculum. We were really overcrowded, using 16 mobiles, no art or music rooms. The music teacher pushed the piano down the hall and the art teacher pushed a shopping cart full of art supplies from room to room. Our instructional materials centers were exceedingly small--in one case it operated out of a gym balcony.
>
> As a result of declining enrollment, we were able to provide adequate facilities in all buildings; and in two cases we breached a wall and doubled the size of the instructional materials center. And in the curriculum offered, because of reduced class size, we were better able to meet the individual needs of kids by small-grouping. Before, 20 were considered a small group.

In Arcadia District, which has only recently begun experiencing declining enrollments, and which is in good financial shape, Supt. Jackson said that a positive consequence of decline has been better utilization of buildings, and added:

> Early in the district's history we were tight for space. Now class size has gone down from 32 to 24. Many buildings had been built for basics--now we have a plus for the educational program--rooms for learning centers, art, music rooms. We can expand our learning centers. Financially, we've been able to buy supplies--now we have space. Decline eases up the space problems. . . .

However, a Karlin district principal stated that a negative consequence of decline has been that there were "bulges" at certain grade levels, with more students at those levels than above or below them. This made it difficult to plan and allocate resources from year to year. Personnel were frequently transferred, which was disruptive for both faculty and students.

A Camden board member said that although art, music, and physical education were cut the most in coping with decline, in some ways these very programs had benefitted by declining enrollment. With fewer classrooms in use, he said, extra rooms could be dedicated to specific uses such as art and music; art teachers wouldn't have to move around from room to room. A Camden teacher agreed that a good effect of contraction was the freeing up of rooms to serve as base rooms for specialty teachers, such as art and music teachers.

But other participants see a negative side to having fewer students in the schools. A Camden principal, Mr. Stone, said that fewer children meant less flexibility in organizing programs in a school building. Such things as tracking on the basis of ability became difficult, as well as the matching of students to teachers compatible with their personalities and backgrounds. He much preferred the flexibility of a large building with several classes per grade. It also became more difficult to solve scheduling problems of special subject teachers who might have to split their time between several buildings when enrollments dropped. Special subjects, as well as after-school activities, often suffered in quality when there were fewer students. When enrollments slipped to the point that multi-age groupings had to be introduced, at that point the education suffered. Dr. Stone was happy that they closed schools when they did.

While an Arcadia principal corroborated his superintendent in describing the easing of space limitations with declining enrollment, he went on to say that class sizes have risen in his district as a result of reorganization, and added the following:

> The other effect [besides financial strain] you have. . . is the fact that you're dropping the number of classes at each grade level. What happens is that your possibilities drop. It reduces your flexibility as far as student grouping. It also reduces your main-streaming possibilities. You have special ed. students and you want to mainstream them into class. It's hard to mainstream into a smaller proportion of normal kids. That strains the classroom teacher.

An Alton principal, Mr. Carter, said some parents thought that the district was combining classrooms to save money when the real reason was that classes were becoming too small in certain buildings. If classes had not been combined through school closings, he said, there would have been some classes of 12 or 15 students.

A problem with declining enrollments seen by several school officials is, as a Camden board member, Mr. Darby, pointed out, that the curriculum is tied to the enrollment and the smaller the district gets, the fewer alternatives the district could offer.

3. What are the Social Consequences of Retrenchment for Students?

One result of school closings can be an easing of residential isolation of some children in the community, especially those who may be located in neighborhoods characterized by strong class or ethnic differences from other groups in the district. A Weston school board member, Mr. Wegner, from the isolated and lower SES (and partly Hispanic) Stratford neighborhood of his district, said: "In some cases I think that the closing of schools was good for the children--for them to get out of their own domain and mix with other kids from other neighborhoods.

"The seventh and eighth grades were moved from Stratford several years ago and I was the first for it."

Mrs. Kloss, a parent active in Weston District affairs, had the following to say about the effects of school closings on district children:

> When enrollments are shrinking and shrinking, the little kids get landlocked--they get locked in with the same group from kindergarten through the sixth grades, which limits the scope of their growth. . . . I see it as a very favorable move. . . . I said in a famous speech (during closing hearings) that "we are not ten islands--what affects one affects us all." The kids are adjusting much better than the parents, and the kids pick up the parents' attitudes; but when the kids have a couple of years to adjust, they have a better scope of things when they hit high school. Stratford kids were especially landlocked. Stratford was K-8 until it was reduced to K-6 a few years ago so the junior high age kids went to Oxford. That meant they got more exposure before they went to high school.

Weston board member, Mrs. Little, when asked about the consequences for the children and the educational program, said:

> Some think you only need to teach them reading and math and that's enough, but I know that exposure to art and music is important. If there was talent there, they could grab onto it. The gifted program should not be affected much because it is state funded. I don't know how much of the band program will survive. We will lose much of our after school activities, and that's important for some kids because that's what they do best. Student councils are run differently in each school, but the premise is that students are allowed to participate in responsibilities and decisions about dances, parties, year books, fund raising. That could be all cut back.

A progressive ex-Trenton board member emphasized the socially negative consequences on children of cutting back school social services. He said that his district cut back first on nurses, social workers, and counselors; and "the children need that more than reading and writing in today's environment."

A Trenton parent, Mrs. Udini, also described what she saw as negative effects of decline on children--both academically and socially--and how parents' attitudes affect how children perceived decline-related changes:

> (loss of state aid) has most hurt the children. In my capacity as lunchroom monitor we have cut back from four to two monitors. This has led to more problems because it's harder to give individual attention, especially to shy children. There's not enough of us to go around. Also materials and things have been cut back. There have been cutbacks in music and art programs and team sports have stopped. That makes it bad on the child. This can increase the problems for the slow child. . .
>
> Well, without money or funds, I mean, you can only work with what you have. The children have felt it--knowing that this is not given to them anymore. The child is not interested in coming to school when they hear it from the parents that the money and programs have been cut back. It has given them a different attitude when they hear about all the monetary problems. . . . The kids know that there is nothing extra for them anymore.

A Camden principal, in describing the loss of flexibility in organizing programs accompanying declining enrollments, mentioned that there was less socialization of children in a smaller classroom. A Camden teacher said that the busing made necessary by the closing of schools was hard on children, especially in bad weather; with busing it was no longer possible to give children individual attention after school.

Mrs. Feldman, an Oakton parent, said that consequences of closing schools for children are "separation from friends with the drawing of boundary lines, split friendships, as some are sent to one school and some to others. The trauma my kids felt only lasted a week, though. They're more adaptable." Another Oakton parent leader, Mrs. Riley, said that "the kids have handled the cut-backs better than the parents."

But a Weston teacher said that as a result of program cutbacks and the return to "education of the masses," "the kids are in turmoil because they hear what their parents say and they pick up the distrust and lack of respect for the system. They say at home that it's the teachers' fault, but it's not."

The Arcadia superintendent, Mr. Jackson, said that he was not "aware of any problems kids themselves have had in making the change. . . I have had problems with parents--especially when a principal is changed--but not with the kids per se. And even with individual kids it's often the parents' reaction we're getting." The Northview superintendent, Dr. Lloyd, said that the main effect of reorganization and closing of schools in response to decline on the children was that it had broken down neighborhood lines. The children were socializing along community rather than neighborhood lines. It had broken down ethnicity, he said, and that was very positive. And a Greenwood parent, Mrs. Jones, said that, although she didn't see any positive consequences of declining enrollments, other people she knows say, "When classes are small the children are easily identified and known. The principal knows every child and is on top of everything. People think it is a private school because of its smallness."

4. What are the Relationships Between Mandated Educational Programs and School Contractions?

One area in which most involved people agree the delivery of educational services has been affected by declining enrollments and finances, taken together, is within special education and other mandated programs and their relation to more traditional, mainstream educational programs in the public schools. Yet there is strong disagreement on just what the effects of decline have been on these programs and what

the shifting of relationships between special mandated and regular curriculums has means for the education children are receiving.

Are special education and other mandates insuring the survival of programs sorely needed by the minority of children with special problems in learning, languages and so forth? Or are they hindering school districts from concentrating scarce resources where they can do the most good? In other words, do resources aimed at special education unfairly take away resources from mainstream programs which are the true core, societal mandate for the schools? Is this funding (or partial and insufficient funding, according to them) without local control preventing those who care more about balanced budgets and cost-cutting than educational quality from seriously damaging the schools and the special programs needed? Or are these mandates from above actually distorting the school organizations' ability to prepare children for what lies beyond elementary school by improperly designating which children belong to such programs? And is the professional and career structure of the teaching profession being altered in harmful ways by the impact of special education funding on the occupational structure of teachers?

The answers to these questions are complex and sometimes contradictory, and they are related to one another in confusing ways. For instance, some educators clearly see themselves fighting against board members who care or understand little about education except for the bottom line of what it costs the taxpayers--fighting to save what they consider to be vital programs threatened by cutbacks in the face of fiscal and enrollment decline. In this view, some of these programs can only be saved by mandates from state and federal governments requiring school districts to provide them; they would surely be eviscerated or eliminated if fiscally conservative board members had

their way. Other board members, parents, and even administrators agree with some citizens that what they had as children in school was good enough for them, so why isn't it good enough for kids today? Or they say, "I had to read and write in English and that's how I learned English and was able to get a job. Why do we have to provide them with Hindu (Yugoslavian, Spanish, etc.) teachers? Why shouldn't they be in the regular classes learning English while they learn everything else?"

Nowhere are the differences in perceptions by different categories of actors of the consequences of a period of contraction on the quality of education more clearly seen than in the analysis of the effects of state and federal mandated programs on the efforts of school districts to adapt to these new conditions. And nowhere are the sharp differences in perceptions over <u>where</u> decline affects educational quality more graphic. Some of the differences in perceptions appears to be due to the varying philosophies of education and the role of schools held by participants and observers; some may be attributable to the variation in positions held by these persons in the schools and communities.

On one end of a continuum of notions about the role of schools vis-a-vis the community and larger society is that most often seen in lower SES districts in our sample: the belief that schools ought to concentrate their limited resources on providing basic skills in the fairest distribution of effort, money, and other resources to the greatest number of students; that is, aim what you have at the average child and give everyone else equal opportunity to take advantage of what is offered. Good examples of this attitude about the schools come from Trenton district. In describing the consequences of decline on educational quality, Trenton Supt. Watson made the following comments:

> In fact the problem is not for us declining enrollments--everyone is experiencing decline--but financial problems. It's the mandated special programs that cause a lot of problems. First, the pendulum swung in the 1930s toward programs for the retarded, then after Sputnik the pendulum swung towards special programs for the gifted; now it's swinging back to programs for the handicapped. (Here his voice took on a tone of outrage.) But what about the average guy? The mayors, people like me, the blue collar workers--the backbone of our country comes out of the average students. Where are the special programs for them? The government says, "Just institute these programs and we'll find you some money." I tell you I am not going to listen to promises from the state anymore!

There is in the Trenton superintendent's anguished comments a sense of betrayal of the common man, of the majority, by those outsiders who bend the shape and function of the public schools to accommodate the supposed needs of the minority, of the uncommon. Not only is the education aimed at the average child suffering, but the distortion of the public schools by special education mandates and other impositions from state and federal governments are, in this view, threatening the survival and shape of the public schools.

Board President Adams, like the Trenton superintendent, blamed much of the problem on government mandates: "The state is going to have to come up with money or stop mandating programs. Our job is not to feed the kids but to educate the kids." A Trenton board member expressed his worry about these issues in relation to decline:

> We've chased more kids out of public schools--the middle income kids mostly--into parochial schools. With more decline we'll end up educating just the poor kids who need special programs and social services. Within fifteen years we'll just be educating the poor kids here. If we get tuition tax credits we'll have a single class educational system--just teaching the poor. And many of the poor are children of just one parent, who have no time for involvement in the school district.
>
> One positive thing I could see coming out of this for the district--like I was brought up in the Pilsen area. There

> if you spoke Polish or Slovenian you were required to go to a parochial school and learn English. The burden of bilingual education was put on the parochial schools at that time. Polish and Italian speaking nuns taught our generation how to speak English.

Directly opposing this view is that of a former president of the Trenton teachers union:

> In this year alone, the children are suffering because of a lack of teachers' aides. The audio-visual program has been curtailed because of the librarian cutback--the library is the hub of the audio-visual program. This is killing kids who need all sorts of special attention. We have Albanian and Yugoslavian bilingual kids, as well as Hispanics. So teachers can't give them the time--and this is in a time when kids need more special attention than ever before--with all the temptations and complications in society like suicides and a high drug rate.

A Weston teachers union leader, Mrs. Casper, expressed the fears of many teachers about the move back to basic education for the "average guy":

> The consequences [of declining enrollments] are that there is no more counseling program, only a basic remedial program, and a more lax gifted program. The main programs are now back to basics, the education of the masses. [She laughed here.] Again, education of the masses, that's what it is. . . . In the educational program itself, there's a lack of individualization necessary in education today. Also, there is a lack of foresight into education, I think. Everything seems to be going backwards, squeezing more kids into a classroom. I don't believe back to basics is where it's at--it's just a way of saving money. Basics are always there. This back to basics is a hanging on to the old ways they cannot give up.

Others argue that there has been a shift by some educators to make these special programs an excuse for not really coping with learning and development problems in ways that help to integrate these children into the mainstream life of the school and community. A Trenton board member put it this way:

> I'm mad at the special education program. It's a dumping ground. If a teacher has a problem with a child, she no longer handles it. If a kid is disruptive, they dump them in special education. And here parents are so buffaloed by all this educational jargon--parents can get scared and run away.

Although Trenton District belongs to a special education cooperative, no Trenton official or parent mentioned it in discussing mandated programs pro or con. On the other hand, in another low SES district--Alton--board member Bukowski said that he didn't think mandated programs caused any great problems for his district, since Alton was already in a special education cooperative and had been providing already the programs mandated by the state.

Because of their being mandated, special education and related programs have a more complex relationship to decline than that of their mere persistence while other programs are being cut. The opening up of space in formerly crowded school buildings as a result of declining enrollments encourages the creation of more special education programs. For example, Supt. Howe in Smithville noted that before decline set in a few years ago, there was a great need for more space, but that as of 1981 they can use their newly emptied space for activities that enhance the programs: "The problem now becomes what to do with excess space. We haven't encountered that yet, due to special education programs and early childhood programs. We have found alternatives to decline."

A Smithville principal agreed that his district:

> hasn't really experienced any problems yet. . . . Maybe the elementary schools are a little harder hit, I don't know. At the same time, the amount of special education students has increased dramatically. . . . Also, we're getting a different type of student: 37% of the kids in this school are from families who've had a change of parent--that isn't like it was ten years ago. . . (D)ecline would enable teachers to give more individual attention to kids--that would be especially helpful for kids with low reading levels due to the socioeconomic level of life experiences.

Weston district had become very overcrowded during its period of growth in the late 1960s, and the decline in enrollment of the 1970s actually eased their problems for several years. Besides opening up room for instructional materials centers and making possible small-grouping to meet individual needs of children, the special education program underwent a large expansion after 1969, largely due to mandates, but also in anticipation of needs before they were mandated. Supt. Scott, in a 1980 interview, made the following comments on special education:

> . . . Another area--and it's tied in with decline--is with Public Law 94-142 and the Illinois Special Education Act, which mandates services for special education children. This area has grown tremendously in this school district, partly as a result of law, partly as a result of declining enrollments. In the peak year of 1971 we had three special ed. classrooms. Today we have [he though a moment] four, eight, I believe next year we will have fourteen rooms for special ed. That's not [the special education co-operative] children from our district.
>
> The needs of these children were not being met in 1971--the population has not changed. We are better at identifying them and providing assistance to them now. This has utilized more space in the face of declining enrollments, so this has been a definite improvement in our instructional program.

When asked if he though the special education programs would have grown without declining enrollments, Supt. Scott replied that "they would have, but it would have required additions or new buildings. . . or the [special education] co-op would have placed them outside the district--and within the co-op to whichever district had rooms. But as it stands, we are talking about the expansion of special education within the district."

Mr. Gaborelli, the Oakton Director of Staff and Development, explained his view of the relationship between mandated programs and decline in Oakton District, when asked if the growth of mandated

programs, such as special education, had created a problem in maintaining other programs:

> That's a tough one. Ultimately, no, but with some reservations. . . . Things are confusing there because we are able to apply for matching monies, so the cost isn't as much as it looks on the rolls. A person writes a program in order to get as much funding as possible, and then hires a person certified in those ways.
>
> I don't think that it was an either/or situation here. It was so bad they had to do something to everybody, and for the first time this year, special education support personnel were cut. But I would say in comparison with other special areas, special education was cut 10-15%, while art, music, etc., were cut 50%. But it's penny wise and pound foolish to cut a great deal.

A different view of Oakton's special education program came from board member Roth:

> Special education throws a whole new problem with this situation [program cutbacks]. Only 5% of our school population are special ed. students but 30% of our teachers are special ed. teachers. The state mandates these programs and says that we need an aide if we go to twelve in a special ed. class. While some special ed. classes need that aide, some don't. There's no room for flexibility here either. $6,250 is paid by the state for the salary of each special ed. teacher but nowadays that's only 1/3 of a salary. This is costly with declining enrollment when we're not getting enough aid because it's based on the average daily attendance.

The president of the Oakton teachers union described the relation between special programs and contraction this way:

> Decline has affected the quality and quantity of programs. As a response, our school district has gone toward special education, which is better supported by state funding. For instance, I'm in Title I which is completely funded by the federal government--which is the direction our school district has gone. School districts in this state are not equitably funded at all. They need to spread out commercial tax funding more.

Mr. Holland, a Camden board member, was emotional in his appraisal of the effects of financial stress on his district. He cited the poor present condition of the curriculum following the elimination of the

gifted program and other cutbacks, and stated that all of the things which had made Camden school district "special" and had attracted him to move there had disappeared. He felt from personal experiences with his children that the district was locked into a very conservative curriculum which needed changes. With the special education mandates, the program for gifted children tended to get cut back while the programs for the slow learners were maintained.

Since gifted programs are not mandated, they--like programs for the average child--may be seen to suffer at the expense of mandated programs designed for slow or problem students. It may be that the appearance of mandated special education programs persisting while other programs, more valued by many parents and educators, are cut back in the face of decline is as much responsible for the opprobrium attached to them as any real hindrance they may have on the deliverance of mainstream educational services.

Another Camden board member, Mr. DeCamp, said he did not think that recent federal and state mandated programs in special education had affected the district adversely; Camden had long been famous for its special education programs. Some people did not understand why the district continued to spend a lot of money on special education when they were cutting programs in other areas--they didn't understand it was mandated now. Since the gifted program was dropped several years ago, he said, people would no longer be moving to Camden to take advantage of it.* Mr. DeCamp did not think many people in the community felt that programs in language, art, and music were that important for

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*The gifted program was reintroduced as a volunteer-run program shortly after this interview, in the fall of 1979.

children; but he felt cutting back these programs did in fact hurt children. And another Camden board member, Mr. Hoffman, thought that mandated special education programs had put a hardship on his district because Camden already had a very good special education program. Similarly, in the Northview district, board member Schumann thought that the growth of special education had created a very expensive program and put requirements on the school district that take away from funds for other programs.

5. What are the Consequences of Decline for Teachers and the Teaching Profession?

In all our sample districts which have experienced program cutbacks, one of the most commonly mentioned consequences are the adverse effects on teachers. Here, more consistently than in their perceptions of effects on the actual quality of education received by children, participants see a decline occurring in the quality of teaching staffs. At first glance, this seems contradictory: How can teaching staffs be damaged without damaging the quality of education? Part of the answer may lie in the "loosely coupled" nature of educational organizations (Weick, 1976). But part of the answer also seems to lie in the common feeling that, although teachers have had to absorb the brunt of contraction at the level of their working conditions (including job security), teachers have striven to maintain the quality of the classroom in spite of the negative pressures of contraction. Teachers are having to work harder with less, but most of them are thought to be dedicated enough to do so, at least in the short run. Yet, the effects of decline have adversely affected their job satisfaction and the occupational structure of their profession, and this may well have harmful consequences for public education in the future. The single,

most often mentioned negative consequence of decline for teachers is lowered teacher morale, followed by changes in the character of teaching staffs as a short and long term result of lowered morale, job security, and job satisfaction. Understandably, teachers mention damage to morale, job security, and job satisfaction more often than other participants; administrators more often bring up consequences for staffing of schools. But all categories of observers and participants agree on the possible short and long term harm retrenchment has done to the teaching profession.

In spite of the argument that teachers may suffer during decline while students may not, there is an inconsistency in the perceptions of many of those interviewed on this point that is consistent with the theory of "loose coupling": There is a tendency for people to agree on the adverse effects of decline-related decisions on teachers, but to disagree on what this has done to the education children are receiving. A good example of this inconsistency comes in the responses of Supt. Scott of Weston district. He stated that the quality of programs had not suffered so far in his district; achievement levels have actually been rising since their peak enrollment years and "in spite of declining enrollment, in spite of the reassignment of teachers, achievement has been maintained or improved." But shortly before making these statements, Supt. Scott described just how the teachers had been adversely affected, and how the occupational structure of the teaching profession was being altered, due to declining enrollments and funds. It is worth quoting his remarks in detail, because they touch on most of the major themes and provide a general framework for analysis of this problem:

[Another] negative consequence of declining enrollments, certainly--definitely--is the staffing problem. . . . Up through our growing years it was not uncommon to hire thirty-five or forty new teachers per year--the highest we ever hired was sixty-seven teachers one year. We used to put them on a bus to show them around the district. An advantage to hiring teachers is that you're constantly bringing in new ideas and techniques with new people. Teachers are great imitators and copiers. Mrs. Jones who has been here eighteen years will copy a new technique from Mrs. Smith who is in her first year. So we were getting staff improvement simply by accident, and that was good. Plus we made it a point that we tried to hire teachers from as many different graduate schools as we could--out of state, etc.--to get the variety of training backgrounds available.

We have not hired a new teacher since [he paused to think] --since 1973. Now we <u>have</u> hired special ed., art and music teachers; but to go out and hire a first or fifth grade teacher--we have not done that. I see that as a definite disadvantage. That incidental improvement ceased in 72-73.

As these factors in teacher contracts have progressed, I see further evidence of potential for less effective instruction in the classroom because as we reduce, we have to call those [laid off] people back when we get a vacancy. They may be qualified but not for that vacancy. But then if we had a second grade teacher who took maternity leave we were not likely to rehire her for a third grade class. We were zeroing in on their level of specialization. But as things tighten up, okay, we would hire them in the entire primary area. But today--okay, as an example, I have a teacher resigning, an upper grade math teacher; and I am going to call back a teacher who has 21 hours training in math but who has never taught math. She'll be teaching six hours a day upper math. This is not unusual in a call-back situation. Yes, they have to be certified. It's not inconceivable that a person who has only taught the sixth grade will be called back to teach kindergarten with no knowledge of how to teach at that level. Declining enrollment has brought this around. It's like bringing a Model-T mechanic to work on a 1980 car.

As another example of decline we instituted in 71-72 elementary guidance counseling--we implemented five positions--and four out of those five were Weston district teachers who were trained in guidance. In 1977 we had to eliminate guidance counselors as a result of the Citizen's Committee recommendation and declining enrollment. Because they were tenured they had to be placed back in the classroom--not that they were less dedicated, but they were less effective.

> This has a similar effect on teachers concerned about their future. They see little or no opportunity for advancement in this district. We have lost some good teachers simply because of that. Teachers in their early or mid thirties who see no place left to go in their career and who don't want to moonlight the rest of their working lives to achieve their goals. We just lost a solid, excellent teacher to the business world because, he said, "I can't cut it forever."
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> So there's no incentive for teachers to improve in a positive way. Instead they have improved or qualified themselves in a defensive kind of way--my phrase. Teachers realize because we have cut teachers up to eight or nine years experience and because the only new ones hired are in special education, these teachers have gone back to school and become qualified in the area of special education. But--and this is why I call it defensive--they--several, not all--have refused on their own to file with the Illinois Office of Education their transcripts to qualify them to be a LD teacher, for instance until such time as they are going to be cut. Then they will--until then hanging on as a fifth grade or p.e. teacher--then they will file their certification and say, "Look, you have an opening and I am qualified with seniority." And they are right. They have a right to job security.
>
> I don't consider this additional schooling to be a positive kind of thing, but simply job protection. Because they have not filed immediately like they would for principal certification, for example, where they'd file that same day. I throw a question mark up when I have to assign one of these teachers, because I'm not sure that that person wants to be here. But he wants to be here rather than unemployed. This is changing the relations of persons to their jobs--since they are sitting there with a transcript in their pocket but they really don't want to be there.
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> . . . When we had an overabundance of teachers, the state cracked down on certification. They did away with waivers, etc., and as a result it is very exacting to be certified for a specific area. This will change--the pendulum will shift like back in the 60s when a four year college person could get provisional certification and teach. High schools will feel it before elementary schools, I definitely believe that. I do see bright young prospects leaving the teaching profession.

In an interview in 1980, the acting superintendent of Oakton, Mr. Scalio, closely paralleled the Weston superintendent in his analysis of the consequences of decline on teaching:

> With a more senior staff, there might not be as many teachers who want to do extra-curricular activities. Physically, mentally, teachers are not in that state--they are getting older. Also, as the staff becomes more senior, they get more set in their ways, and the competition of young blood is not there. To a good teacher it makes no difference, but team work is important to many teachers to gain competence--and now there's less of that there.
>
> Also, with the state of the economy, teachers are going back for more education, but not necessarily in methods, etc.--in things that will help the children. But they are going back to be certified in things that will protect their jobs. An example would be a French teacher learning to teach reading courses, math, or science--subject areas that their seniority will allow them to move into. This second certification is going to protect their jobs, so instead of a French teacher teaching French, we'll get French minors who have used their seniority to bump.

From the perspective of these two superintendents, the major effect of contraction on teachers has been: (1) the loss of infusion of "young blood" into the profession, loss of good younger teachers, and the aging of the teaching staff, which has meant a lowering of energy and innovative approaches being infused into the classroom curriculum; (2) the shift of teachers from their major area of competence to secondary areas more likely to be supported during cutbacks, which can mean a loss of teaching competence across all fields as teachers with greater seniority move away from teaching their specialties and "bump" more competent, but newer teachers in more protected subject areas; and (3) a greater concern for job protection than for improving skills in ways meant primarily to help children. A fourth major effect of decline on teachers which these two administrators failed to mention, but which almost all teachers interviewed mentioned, is the sharp lowering of morale in districts which have made cutbacks in response to contraction. All of these effects are directly related to the firing of teachers as a way to cut costs and trim back programs in response to enrollment

and financial decline. Cutting back curriculum in extra-curricular activities, closing schools, reorganizing grades--all these are often synonymous with the reduction in force--or "riffing"--of teachers, especially from the perspective of the teachers themselves.

Let us examine other interview responses pertaining to the four major points raised here:

1. Loss of younger teachers entering and staying in profession.

When non-tenured teachers and even lower-level tenured teachers are losing their jobs, and little hiring of newly trained teachers is occurring (and what hiring there is often holds little chance for tenure), it is not surprising that young people in college are not flocking to be trained as public school teachers. Many educators have bemoaned the lack of highly qualified people now moving into the teaching proession while many of the most qualified younger teachers move out of the profession. These people are also disproportionately those trained in the hard sciences, math, and engineering who can find much higher paying, and sometimes more secure positions outside of education in government and industry. There is a related lowering of the proportion of male teachers in elementary schools--never high--which some see as having harmful effects on the socialization and proper development of children. Some connections of these problems are brought out in the following comments by a Smithville principal:

> I'm afraid of good people leaving education--it's the good ones who are frustrated. Kids are more difficult and then the rewards aren't there and hassles abound. . . . Teachers have to be motivated and creative and in losing them we're losing the best part of our system. . . . I see as the number drops the salaries will drop again. In our team concept presently each team has a man. If decline results in cuts we'll lose even those men.

The loss of younger teachers joining the staffs of schools while other younger teachers already on the staffs are being cut, means a double effect on the age-structure of the teaching profession. A Weston board member, Mrs. Little, echoed this theme in stating that the teachers are the hardest hit with decline; and while the Weston staff was still excellent, they were losing the youngest and most energetic teachers. "You don't get left with the cream of the crop" following a reduction in the size of the teaching staff, as an Oakton board member put it. Also, as pointed out by the Director of Staff and Development, although Oakton district had solved most of its financial problems by 1980, the potential to rebuild was compounded by the fact that they had released most of their youthful staff.

Some parents and school officials blame this trend not only on decline per se, but on the teachers unions' success in instituting, at the state level and in union contracts, provisions for forcing the school districts to make reductions-in-force through seniority guidelines. Thus the static complacency some see in older teaching staffs is due to the tightening of tenure control through efforts by the teachers unions. A Camden district board member, Mr. Daniels, feared that pending laws being considered by the state legislature would exacerbate this,and that a problem with decline is the failure of the district to be able to keep new teachers and the consequent aging of the teaching force. The fear here of the parents and officials is the loss in total quality of teaching performance. As Mrs. Feldman, an Oakton parent put it: "I do not believe a teacher for having been here for ten years is necessarily a good teacher. But because of seniority many fine teachers lost their jobs. There should be a [merit] system."

A Karlin principal, however, said that a positive consequence of decline has been a sharper look at the quality of teachers. The district was able to increase its standards for hiring teachers, and the staff is now more stable. Before decline, most of staff turnover was due to personal reasons. With decline there seems to be less turnover, and there is "a more stable population of professionals." The more stable staff has been good for the educational program in that less turnover means that teachers have "a longer history from which to plan."

In general, though, there is fear of a loss of innovation, youthful energy, and the bonds of understanding possible with more experiences in common between children and younger teachers. Although a Camden district parent said in her interview that she did not think there had been any adverse effect on the quality of their educational programs due to declining enrollment, she thought that with the tenure and seniority rules some of the best teachers had been lost, and from the parents' point of view, a "merit riffing" procedure would be better. In one of our upper SES districts, parents and officials are pleased that, through collective bargaining, they instituted a merit riffing system for teachers several years ago, one which was unaffected by more recent legislation because of a "grandfather clause."

2. Occupational shift in areas of specialization on part of teachers.

The excerpts quoted above from the Weston and Oakton superintendents' interviews illustrate this consequence of decline very well. A Camden teachers union leader corroborated this description of the shifting of teachers from their major areas to their minor areas of specialization. She attributed it not to motivations of job security, however, but to

the fact that with the reduction of teachers in her district and the consequent reduction in the variety of specializations represented in the remaining staff, teachers were having to teach courses in their minor area of specialization as well as in their major area. She acknowledged that, because of this, they were more likely to take graduate courses in their minor area (and by implication, get less training in their major areas).

A Leland district principal, however, said that a result of the reorganization and consolidation of the district in response to decline was that many teachers were given the opportunity to "get back to their strongest subject areas." Whereas with declining enrollments many teachers had had to take on a course which was not in their subject area, concentrating all of the students in one grade at one school allowed them to teach only what they wanted to teach.

A tactic sometimes used by districts to avoid at least the appearance of cutting more peripheral programs, such as art, music and p.e., which are mandated by the state but not considered core curriculum areas, is to move these activities into the daily schedule of the home room teacher and eliminate the specialized teaching staff previously responsible for providing these services. The Oakton school board president, Mr. Thomas, said that despite the cutbacks made in art, music, p.e., and librarians, "for a while yet we are not likely to get into the hard core of the classroom. It is the posture of the board not to interfere with teachers, but cutbacks may put hardships on them by cutting special area teachers and putting more burden on the regular classroom teacher." Several informants remarked on their misgivings about having stiff old teachers leading children in classroom exercises as a substitute for separate physical education

classes taught by specialists.

3. Emphasis on job security over quality of education delivered on part of teachers.

The changing internal organization of the schools during decline has meant a change in the incentive structure for teachers, according to the Weston and Oakton superintendents and other participants. A Camden board member, Mr. Hoffman, said that the starting salaries for teachers were not as high in Camden as in surrounding districts, which made it harder for them to get new teachers as good as those they used to get. He added that declining enrollments nationwide has meant that teachers are less inclined to move and so the district is stuck with some poor teachers who would not move or quit. Oakton board member Roth said that, in her opinion, Oakton has a lower quality teaching staff than surrounding districts because her district "was low on the pay scale ten to twelve years ago when there was a shortage of teachers, and we didn't attract the best ones." But, she added, raising the pay scale of teachers would not alone improve incentives and performance.

4. Effects on teacher morale and job satisfaction.

The overwhelming negative effect of decline-related decisions on teachers, particularly according to the teachers themselves, has been a general lowering of morale due to changes brought on by decline. A Leland principal called the damage to the morale of the staff in his district the major impact of decline. This consequence, of course, is a result of the combined effects of decline on teachers. Job insecurity, layoffs, changes in the occupational structure of many teaching staffs--all affect teacher morale.

When asked about the main consequences of declining enrollment in her district, a Weston teachers union leader spoke on the effects

of decline from the teachers' perspective:

> Well, number one, it's really given teachers a real low morale--very low--the worst it could ever be. Teachers are the first cut with declining enrollments in our school district. Children are the last thing they think about. They say they do it all for the good of the children but it's really the last thing they think about.
>
> Of course the loss of jobs is a shame, but we expected that. The worst thing is the loss in quality of the education. Along with lowering morale, it has caused fear on the part of teachers, a certain arrogance in the administration leading to a power-hungry type of thing. It's sad. We cannot work like we used to. . . .

The Weston teachers union president echoed this analysis of the consequences of decline:

> First, the loss of jobs--a total of 96 teachers lost in the last six years due to the layoffs. Some are able to get other positions elsewhere. They haven't called back but about twenty or twenty-five. Even if they do get rehired, there is low job stability and low morale--very low morale in the last two years.
>
> . . . I don't like to say it, but they're not 100% on their job, but it's a fact when you have such turmoil. It's low teacher morale. They think, "If I don't feel good I'll just call in sick." Teachers are not feeling appreciated. There is no incentive.
>
> . . . There is less time for special programs. This is the start, okay, but eventually it is going to get to the point, if the board has its way, of doing away with all special teachers except the mandated ones, like p.e. The result will be unhappy staff and a lot of absences.

Board members and administrators who must deal with teachers unions in adversarial roles tend to see teachers as complaining unduly, while teachers see tightfistedness and a lack of comprehension on the part of district officials with whom they must negotiate contracts. A Trenton teachers leader, in describing the poor relations between staff and school board and the damage caused by decline, said:

> Those board members on the negotiating team believe that if there is a declining enrollment, there should be a commensurate decline in teachers' salaries. They don't

> understand that the district still needs the same number of teachers if you're cutting back just a few students from each class. Even the janitorial staff is a skeleton. Teachers are cleaning blackboards when they should be working on their lessons. It's embarrassing to admit but I've seen teachers ask the janitor not to clean the floor on a particular day so he could clean the blackboard instead.

The president of the Oakton teachers union, Mrs. Barzun, gave a more psychological analysis of the effects of decline-related decisions on teachers:

> This is one of the consequences of declining enrollments: teachers get transferred all over the district. For some teachers it is an exciting time, but for some it is disturbing. Some teachers need security, like in their relationships with principals and parents. A lot depends on personality. The administration needs more awareness of that. They say, "You are next in line, so go"--instead of getting someone to transfer voluntarily. But when schools close teachers are in limbo.
>
> With the cutting of programs and the laying off of teachers, there is just a general lowering of morale. We never know from year to year if we will have a job. Last year they fired teachers with eight or nine years teaching in the district. Naturally that affects our negotiations for higher salaries. They say, "We don't have the money." We say, "Get it."

There are two kinds of teacher movement accompanying decline-related decisions which appear to "disturb" teachers and harm morale. The first is the moving of teachers from "closed" schools to "open" schools, and the second is the transportation of specialized teachers from school to school during the day or week to provide services, such as library instruction, no longer supportable in a single school. The first kind of move involves the strains of integration of two or more partial faculties into one functioning unit, accompanied by the distress of the loss of some teachers riffed in the move and no longer participating in the new arrangement. For many teachers, it also involves, as it does for students, longer distances to travel from home to school.

The second involves the rootlessness and sense of instability of art, music, library, physical education teachers, etc., as they make the rounds of schools during the day or week--and the added complexity of the job accompanying this change in teaching locations.

Other participants and observers--predominately in those upper SES districts which have not had to cut programs as deeply as some other districts or have been able to compensate by reaching out to other community institutions--have seen positive outcomes of the changes on the teachers. One Oakton principal said, "You understand this is a well-staffed district compared to most metropolitan school districts, but we have lost much of that; and the extra time paid for preparation of classes has been lost." But another Oakton principal said that consolidation of schools and moving teachers around has had positive effects because "after a number of years teachers get into a rut. Even explaining to new people gets you to thinking about your old programs and you tend to think how you might do it better."

A Northview board member, Mrs. Goldberg, said that the elimination of neighborhood schools and the consolidation of schools in her district "provides a more professional situation for the teachers; they are better able to exchange ideas, for example. Previously the teachers did not have that much contact with each other."

Dr. Everett, a Greenwood principal, saw both positive and negative effects of decline on the quality of teaching in his district. He thought the positive consequences of declining enrollment were that the ratio of students to teachers had improved, and that it was now possible to use the art and music teachers better because of this. The negative consequences are increased teacher militancy and fear for their jobs. He said that the consequences for the children and the nature of the

services delivered have been intangible: there hasn't been a cutback in educational programs, but the teacher militancy may have had some intangible effects. He said they had lost good people in education because of decline--they especially had lost the young people. Another Greenwood principal saw a more general problem of decline in small districts: When you have only one first grade teacher there is no one with whom to plan curriculum and share ideas. Finally, a Greenwood board member said that declining enrollment has created part-time jobs rather than full-time jobs for teachers and administrators within the district.

6. Is the Overall Quality of Programs and Education Harmed or Enhanced as a Result of Retrenchment?

One of the most forceful statements that the core educational programs do not necessarily suffer during decline came from Supt. Scott of Weston district, in answer to the question of what had been the consequences of policies or steps taken for children and the nature of the educational programs:

> At this point (summer 1980) I feel the quality of programs here have not suffered. In fact, they have improved, and this is not just a subjective statement. I could point to achievement test scores that show the level rising since the peak year. In fact, since 1974 to date, we are above the national average in every subject area in every grade level. So in spite of declining enrollment, in spite of the reassignment of teachers, achievement has been maintained or improved.

The two Weston principals interviewed agreed that the quality of instruction and educational programs so far has not been adversely affected by declining enrollments. But one added that he saw no advantages to declining enrollments--as opposed to a steady enrollment--because the problems were just the reverse of a growing district.

The general feeling among Weston board members was that up through 1980 the district had been able to maintain educational quality through

reorganization and groupings accompanying or preceeding closings. But at the time they were interviewed, in late 1980, some were very apprehensive that program cutbacks under discussion might, indeed, harm the quality of schools. Board president Wegner didn't "think it has had any adverse effect on education itself, except for the possibility that teachers are disgruntled." He thought the closing of schools had been good for some children socially, but he feared the consequences of decisions to be made in early 1981:

> The problems that are arising is that the help of the good Lord is needed to guide us in deciding what areas should be cut first. That's what's going to happen. A lot of kids' education is going to be dampened by what's going to happen in the next few months. Cuts are definitely going to have to be made in a few months.
>
> You know, what do you cut out? Athletics? How many kids are staying in high school only because of athletics? How many great musicians do we lose? Artists? Children's lives may be affected by any cuts you make. Where do we get the grace and guidance to decide what to do? (His tone was very somber here.) It's a grave responsibility.

When Mrs. Tobich, another Weston board member, was asked about consequences for children and the nature of the educational program, she replied:

> Well, the children in our school system already have taken cuts in art, music, and library. Some don't realize it because the child doesn't remember how many times he went to those classes, and therefore the parents don't. There have been cutbacks in the number of interschool and intramural sports. Maybe it's so minimal children haven't felt it yet, but from here on out anything we do is definitely going to be felt. . . . But even though some say it's only art and music--but that's what some shine at.
>
> At Eton they don't get recess or field trips. The only thing is extracurricular activities--dances, sports--and they're not getting any incentive to go on in school, especially the boys, and somewhere along the line they're going to get something in their heads if they're going to stay in school. It's a sickening thing: we are going to have to take something away and we don't know where to do it so that it is not going to hurt some child.

> . . . I believe they have already cut into the quality of education. Even if they take away half a day of art and music they are cutting the qualify of education--not giving them more. Whether the children realize it or not, they are being short-changed; in fact they are.

One Weston teacher's union leader, Mrs. Matthews, had this to say:

> Children are losing in the areas of art, music, library. Gym classes were not supposed to be cut but there are not extra gym classes every couple of weeks like before. It's not going to happen the way they claim it is. Special teachers, like librarians, are now travelling from building to building.

When asked about any positive consequences of declining enrollments, Ms. Matthews answered:

> There could be as far as improving the total educational program of the children--more services, more individual work. They could do that with the excess of teachers but the board won't consider that. They could have taken an empty building and made a junior high program. Years ago when they talked about reorganizing the district the teachers wanted a real junior high program where we could have home economics, industrial arts, fine arts. One person cannot do that.
>
> We saw declining enrollment working for the betterment of the children in the district, but the board sees it strictly as a financial matter. Closing schools is a way to save money. . . .

In describing the consequences of decline on educational quality in the Trenton district, Supt. Watson stressed the cutbacks made in art teachers, library services, and general music classes; he also mentioned the institution of fees for instructional supplies, participation in band and athletics, and the rise in fees for industrial arts and home economics. And although some Trenton board members, administrators, teachers, and parents thought that these cutbacks made in response to fiscal stress and decline had harmed the children, school board president Adams argued that in making these cutbacks, they had not substantially harmed the core educational programs because these

were services that were offered by other local groups such as libraries and health and social welfare agencies. He said that while they now charge for services once offered for free, many parents don't pay and their children still receive them. His wife added, that "the programs and people cut have been fringes. We are not down to the meat yet."

A Trenton principal, Mr. Becker, mentioned that decline has resulted in a few program cuts--because of failed referendums, he added--and in some instances larger classes, which he saw as hurting delivery of educational services. But he saw as positive the fact that fewer students meant more individual attention was possible on the part of the principal, and principals can know the parents better and understand individual problems better. Another Trenton principal, Mr. Savalas, was more negative in assessing the delivery of services during decline:

> All I can see is more problems. If I had more kids I would have more sections and more classes. Right now there's only one section in any course, so scheduling is harder and we have to slot kids to avoid conflicts. . . . The negative consequences are the cutbacks in programs, but again this is because of a money problem, not an enrollment problem.

A Trenton ex-board member, Mr. Brooks, emphasized that the delivery of educational services had not suffered because of enrollment decline but because of financial decline:

> . . . decline of enrollment doesn't have any effect on the school system until inflation catches up with the last referendum that was passed. . . . At that point there is a great effect. . . . People are not taking inflation into account. My last year on the board (1978-79) we were spending $1,900 per student. We had some programs then--reading specialists with MAs, we not only had counselors we had social workers. We were heavy into special education. We had a bilingual program not only Spanish but for the Yugoslavians. We had four music people, and quite a few librarians.

> We have lost most of them. The counselor resigned--he knew his ass was grass. There's no assistant superintendent no more. . .
>
> [The administrators'] feelings are ones of sorrow to see a system built up by about 1973 with excellent staff to accommodate individual students just go down the drain--not so much because of declining enrollment but because of inflation.

Although agreeing that financial decline rather than enrollment decline was the real issue, a Trenton board member who is also a Chicago public school teacher had a quite different assessment of the consequences of decline:

> You know, I haven't seen any liabilities that much. When I look at the supplies and materials that these kids have, it's more than we get in Chicago--as far as supplies and books. Now they've had to cut some programs. A social worker this year, and last year they cut art and library staff. . . .
>
> Talking in terms of declining enrollments--that's the wrong slant. That was inflation that caused those cutbacks, not declining enrollment. That was declining resources. So it could be an asset that we don't have that many kids to take care of with inflation. Declining resources are the main problem rather than declining enrollments. . . .
>
> Some say that libraries are indispensible and you have to have them. It depends on your point of view. Some say that art is necessary, etc., but I've not seen any real changes, honest to goodness. As long as you can get supplies and materials and teachers, the frills are all right but they are not essential.

And in the opinion of another board member, Mrs. Rizzo, "I don't think [the educational program] has suffered at all. We had gotten away from the Three R's before decline set in." The implication in her comment is that decline is forcing them to concentrate on the core curriculum.

In another low SES district, Alton, Supt. Logan said that there had been no significant effects on the educational program because of contraction. But he added that the school closings were necessary to

maintain the educational level. He said he didn't think small class sizes were good, and the school closings eliminated the necessity of having very small classes.

Although one Alton principal, Ms. White, thought that the combining of grades in classrooms and lower numbers of students in classes were bad for education, and that closing schools and moving teachers created morale problems among teachers, she also thought that the Alton curriculum had been maintained at a high level and she didn't think that it had suffered during the period of declining enrollments or board actions in response to decline.

Alton board member Burr thought that the superintendent was able to adjust quite well and, except for the increased number of combined grade classes, the cuts had not affected education in the district very much. He mentioned that although quite a bit of money had been cut out of the physical education program, the remaining program was still a good one. In some cases, where the school district had previously employed librarians and nurses' aides, these people had been released and volunteers--usually house mothers--were supplying some of these services. Mr. Burr specifically did not think that the quality of education ahd suffered, and he did not think that the problems of declining enrollment were adversely affecting the district in any long term way. Alton board member Canfield corroborated this assessment, adding that he saw declining enrollment as an opportunity for trying new and innovative approaches to education. He thought that as a whole the school district was less conservative in its approach to education as a result of decline, and more willing to try more innovative educational techniques.

Another Alton board member, Mrs. Parker, said that while the quality of education had not been suffering with the cutbacks made, it certainly had not been increasing. She was afraid that children may not be receiving quite the rounded education that they would have received without educational program cuts. She thought the district as a whole was merely limping along with all of the volunteers that they used for services, such as library aides who sometimes couldn't even count books very well.

An Alton parent, Mrs. Gold, thought that they should have closed schools a year before they did, instead of cutting programs (she is from the large Stephens School area which would not have been closed). She thought music and athletics cutbacks might hurt the children later on in high school and college. She said she was very upset by the cuts and thought they were a step backwards into the past of 30 years ago. She said some of the cuts will be restored, but this couldn't have happened without school closings.

In Camden district, Supt. Weaver said that, if anything, he thought that the instructional program had improved in the years of declining enrollment due to the consolidation that was possible. But Camden board member DeCamp cited the reductions in Camden educational programs and said he definitely felt the quality of education had suffered, and that these cuts were unpopular in the community. He went so far as to state that one could get as good an education within the Chicago system as one could get in Camden (a remarkable statement by a board member in an affluent suburban Chicago school district!). Camden board member Peterson, on the other hand, thought the quality of education had actually increased somewhat because of the school closings, because with consolidation the school district had been able

to add some services that were previously unavailable.

A Camden teachers leader, Ms. Cole, said that in general she thought the district had done a good job of building during the years of increased enrollments, had little choice in the decisions it had to make in responding to declining enrollment, and that there was no great change in the educational program delivered to the children. Both parents interviewed in Camden thought there had been no major changes in the quality of education or in the curriculum after the closing and merger of schools. One parent said that if anything, the educational program had improved because with more children in a building now, there was more flexibility in programming and no longer any combined-grade classes.

Acting Supt. Scalio of Oakton District made the following comments in 1980:

> For the first time the effect of declining enrollment is being felt in curriculum areas. We have cut before--a nurse here, an official there--but parents still had it all. Now the parents are shocked because there is no longer violin or string instrument instruction. The art curriculum has been cut literally in half--the same with music. Classroom teachers are going to be teaching p.e.
>
> . . . This year we held the status quo. Next year the consequences will be a 50% reduction in non-academic areas. Fringes--extra-curricular activities--will not exist--clubs, intramurals. Some of the arts--drama, orchestra--will not even be there.

Mr. Kinsky, Carlson School principal in Oakton District, had this to say about the effects of contraction on educational service delivery in his district:

> The overall nature of the programs hasn't really changed. We are sticking very close to the curriculum framework and the basic theory of the district to meet the children's needs wherever they are at. You do have to work to overcome negative--especially fourth and fifth graders'--feelings of "I'm lost. I'm new here." But we have done fairly well in that. . . .

Oakton board member Greenberg had a similar view of the consequences of decisions made in response to declining enrollments:

> The transition the kids made from closed buildings to open ones was smooth. The children did not suffer. They get as good or better education. That's not a slap to the closed schools, but the receiving schools and the parents tried extra hard to make it work.

But another board member, Mrs. Roth, had a quite different assessment when she was asked about the consequences for children in schools and the nature of the educational program offered them:

> Eight years ago Sept. my 1st child started to school and this year my 6th child started. My 1st child could have gone into instrumental, strings, or band--for my last child there's only the band. The 1st had p.e. . . . We're supposed to have p.e. 5 times a week but we've had waivers from the state. Now they get it taught one day a week plus some exercises led by a couple of crippled old ladies. When my 1st started to school, classes were grouped according to level. Now my youngest is in split classes. You just can't have that kind of response from teachers with split classes.
>
> In closing schools a lot of kids are getting bused where before they were walking to school. There is less art and music. Library services have been cut down.

The Oakton teachers union president also gave a negative evaluation of the effects of decline on educational quality:

> Cutting programs, I think, is terrible. We had such good special programs in art and music. I can't see where this is not going to have an adverse effect on children. The district is trying to keep basics, but so much of that is mandated. But education is much more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children learn math and reading in the fine arts, too--they learn how to apply it. It's a way of applying what they learn in the basics to--I dunno, to fun things. They'll tell you they're not cutting it because the classroom teacher will do the other half-hour, but that's all in the way you look at it. . . . In the area of fine and practical arts is where the district has chosen to make cutbacks, so teachers in the regular classrooms have to take up slack and provide the half-hour cut out of those programs. Okay, but you're dealing with teachers who haven't done that in ten years. Although teachers will cope and do their best, they can't be as good as a specialist.

When asked if she saw any positive consequences of declining enrollments, ex-teachers union president Mrs. Keel responded:

> No, not in this district. There could be smaller class sizes, but it doesn't work that way here because decline goes on with budget deficits, and we get schools with only one grade level. A situation like this has no flexibility and the kids don't get the advantages of decline. . . Positive? Nothing--there's nothing positive in cutting a program, there's nothing positive in having p.e. in a classroom. It's all negatives, just the opposite (she laughed).

In Arcadia District there has been reorganization of classes because of localized pockets of decline, according to one principal, Mr. Olson, and that is a continuing problem because the philosophy of the district is to have a multi-level program across grades; but he thought that program cutbacks would occur only if they decline drastically--he thinks they'll stabilize in the mid 80s. Arcadia board member Kildare agreed with others interviewed in that district that decline-related choices have not yet damaged the programs in their schools.*

In high SES Northview District, Supt. Lloyd said that there were virtually no consequences on the educational program. They were able to broaden music by better staff utilization. The main idea was to protect the program itself. Northview board member Cohen thought the major consequence of closing two schools has been the <u>educational advantages</u>; in particular, she thought the latest closing and moving to age centered schools has been an advantage. She said the progression through the grades and into junior high school will be easier because

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*A major reason for the lack of effects of decline in Arcadia District is that it has not experienced general enrollment decline until the past few years. It and Mesick are the exceptions among our school district sample in that they continued to grow throughout most of the 1970s.

now these kids will know each other from the time they start kindergarten. Ms. Hamilton, another Northview board member, said that the consequences of decline have been for the better in her district, especially in maximizing the use of teachers and staff and so getting the most for the dollar. They now have the best class groupings and that's good for teachers and children, she stated. Northview board member Stratford said that some minor program adjustments have been made along the way, but overall the program has remained intact, which is quite an accomplishment. "The program delivered has not been diminished, at least from my perception," she said.

Concerning the effects of decline on the educational quality of his upper SES district, Greenwood board member Reardon said in May of 1981, after the district had passed a referendum and cut back some programs:

> In the area of reducing costs, overhead, we still had some areas of curriculum and program that could be reduced without sacrificing quality. Anything beyond that would be down to the bone. We now have a high quality program with no fat, and the income we need to support it. . . .

On the consequences of decline on the educational service delivery in Greenwood district, a teachers union leader, Mr. Gilbert, said:

> We haven't lost any real programs--music, shop have not been cut back. Next year the art teacher will serve both the elementary and the junior high in order to fill up her schedule. . . . The consequences [for children] are not felt yet. I cannot say what the consequences will be until we get to next year. Next year will be very tight [crowded]. . . . Class sizes will be larger. That will make it harder for self-contained classroom teachers. They did try to maintain the programs without cutting. If they <u>can</u> maintain--that is yet to be seen.

Another teacher, Ms. Glickman, said:

> Actually [the consequences for children in the schools] will equal out. They haven't cut the special programs. Little will change. The fourth graders will go down to gym four times a week--those from School A who have had gym five times a week--but the children from school B will now have gym four times when before they had it only three times. . . . The kindergarten will have a music physical education class; otherwise there's no change that's obvious.

It is apparent in the repetitive singling out and mentioning of the slight alternations in the gym program, by many of those interviewed in Greenwood District, just how trivial have been the effects of decline-related decisions on educational service delivery in that district.

By contrast, in Karlin the teachers association president said that there has been a narrowing of the educational program, so that there have been fewer electives. She said that, "We have been forced back into the read, write, and math syndrome," and it has been harder to carry on gifted programs.

Conclusions

Along with clearly negative or problematic effects, there are some positive consequences of declining enrollments and of the measures adopted in response to them. For instance, a persistent theme of many participants in describing the consequences of decline is that children adjust better and faster than do parents to grade reorganization, the closing of schools, and other decisions directly affecting their daily activities. In many cases, the changes caused by these decisions help the children in socially useful ways, such as by the lessening of residential isolation and increased opportunity to meet new children from different social backgrounds.

While the process of reaching decisions on how to respond to declining enrollments is usually painful and conflictual, contraction presents school districts with the opportunity to make beneficial changes in a sometimes stagnant system by adjusting the internal organization of staffing, grade organization, and curriculum. The apparent strategy of some district officials to couch the language and discussion of policy alternatives during decline within the framework of reorganization and reinstitution may at times be a conscious or unconscious effort to disguise the searing difficulties of closing neighborhood schools; but it may also be a conscious and responsible effort on their part to make the best of a traumatic situation by using their professional expertise to change the system for the better--given the exigencies of having to make changes in the structure of the system in any case. The ossification of organizations once they have been set up is well established; the opportunity along with a compelling reason to restructure them is a rare thing indeed.

The most consistently negative assessment of the effects of declining enrollment on the quality of education concerns the impact on teachers. The negative effects on the teaching profession include the loss of young teachers leaving the profession, the declining quality of people entering the profession, the shift of teachers away from their major areas of competence largely for reasons of job security, and a general lowering of morale and job satisfaction. These effects are not seen by most respondents as having yet caused major damage to the delivery of quality education, but they constitute a cause for some pessimism about the future of public school education.

One danger that is evident is that the combination of an aging teaching force with the consolidation or addition of new instructional tasks for classroom teachers could lead to overload and "burnout" for more teachers. Here, we have in mind comments such as those about "crippled old ladies" having to lead physical exercises in classrooms. The danger of overload here is similar to the findings of Crespo and Haché (1982) about the effects of declining enrollments in Quebec. They report that administrative roles and duties often have been combined in connection with personnel reductions in the province. This has produced administrative overload compounding the problem of decreasing motivation, energy and aspirations among tenured, aging administrators facing shrinking opportunities for promotions. The result, say Crespo and Haché, is a tendency toward minimal job performance oriented toward routine organizational maintenance rather than innovation and development.

Whether parents, board members and administrators think the consequences of decline have been good or bad for education has much to do with what importance they attach to neighborhood schools and what they think schools are supposed to be doing. In some school districts, particularly in working class areas, the claim for neighborhood schools is so strong and legitimate within the local community that it can be the source of extensive, persistent opposition to efforts to adjust to declining enrollments by consolidating schools and programs. Flexibility in curriculum and staffing appears to be lost when declining enrollment is not accompanied by consolidation of schools and programs. Conversely, the closing of neighborhood schools and consolidation of classes, programs, and staffs actually can increase, not merely maintain, the flexibility of a school district's internal organization.

Still, teachers point out that the staff reductions usually accompanying consolidation severely limit the potential for increased flexibility.

There is strong disagreement over whether a core curriculum of the "Three R's" is the overriding concern, or whether, as many educators believe, secondary social and educational services are also of equal importance for the proper development of children. Those who believe schools should concentrate on the core instructional functions of the Three R's are less likely to bemoan the cutting back of what they see as "fat," "fringes," and "frills." But there is dispute also over what constitutes such educational "icing." In the view of some parents and school officials, programs such as bilingual education, many forms of special education, counselors, social workers, and hot lunch programs, are peripheral to the core instructional tasks of the schools. Those holding this view often feel that state and federal mandates forcing districts to continue such programs during decline detract from the ability to maintain the core instructional programs. Others involved in the school districts, often teachers and more "socially progressive" parents and officials, see the existence of mandates as all that prevents many essential school services from being eliminated during a period of declining enrollment and fiscal strain. Differences in attitude are associated with the kind of children people think the schools should be most responsive to--the "average child" or those with special needs.

The expansion of special education programs during decline is related to the persistence of funding through mandates, the opening up of space for special classes in existing school buildings, the desire of teachers and administrators to preserve teaching staff positions by shifting teachers to positions wholly or partly funded by entitlements,

and a perceived increasing need in many schools for programs to help children with weak family and economic support systems outside the schools, which may lead to problems requiring special attention. If some shift of school activities toward special education programs is an attempt by entrepeneurial administrators to solve budgetary problems, some also may be reflective of an increasing societal need for such programs.

A possible effect of the persistence and expansion of special education and other mandated programs, and the occupational shift of teachers toward specialty and entitlement program credentialing for reasons of job security, however, may be an alteration or distortion of the internal organization of the school districts. There are strong differences in opinion among respondents over the long-term benefits or dangers of such changes in the structure of schools.

Apart from the negative effects on the teaching profession, the other most disturbing development we see involves the implications of the erosion of the school curriculum and associated activities and services. Not only are art, music, library services and the like being cut back or eliminated, but there is evidence that cutbacks of "extras" are occurring sooner and deeper in lower socioeconomic status, less affluent school districts than in higher socioeconomic status, more affluent ones. The irony, of course, is that higher socioeconomic status parents, as compared with lower socioeconomic status parents, are both more able and more inclined to supplement their children's education and compensate for things unavailable or removed from the schools' offerings. If decline and retrenchment are allowed to proceed without adequate financial equalization efforts by state or federal

authorities, the result is likely to be more harmful for less affluent school districts and students than for more affluent ones. Local control and "choice" will simply provide another example of the proposition that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

Chapter VI

Summary and Implications of the Study

The central questions of this study were:

1. What are the impacts upon public school governance of the change from growth and relative affluence to declining enrollments and constrained budgets?
2. How do these changes affect policy making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery of educational services in school districts that vary in such key factors as socioeconomic status, fiscal circumstances, and conflict propensity?
3. What characteristics of such districts account for variation in policy making, conflict management, policy choices, and outcomes in the delivery of educational services?

To answer these questions, we conducted a longitudinal, comparative case study of fifteen suburban school districts located in two metropolitan areas of the United States. The study built upon, and followed up, an earlier comparative case study of eight Chicago suburban school districts conducted during the growth period of the 1960s. The earlier study sought to explain differences among school districts in conflict propensity and conflict management by means of a comparison of four working class and four middle to upper-middle class school districts. For this study, the eight original school districts were revisited and the sample was expanded to provide greater variation in such school district characteristics as enrollment size, rate of enrollment decline, social heterogeneity, and regional culture.

Data on the fifteen districts were collected principally through direct observation of meetings and interviews over the three-year period 1978-79 to 1980-81. In addition, case histories were developed on each of the districts for the seventeen-year period from 1964 to 1981. Altogether, data were drawn from seven sources: (1) interviews with core participants and observors of the policy-making and service delivery processes, (2) observation of school board meetings, (3) documentary sources, (4) election and referenda results, (5) census data, (6) enrollment trend and school building utilization data, and (7) fiscal and operational costs data.

Findings and Implications

To appreciate the magnitude of the change that suburban school district officials have had to cope with, one must recognize the extent to which school district planning and policy development were driven by enrollment growth and school construction during the 1950s and 1960s. In the post World War II years, school district growth was in many ways especially a suburban phenomenon. Further, many suburban districts in the northeast and midwest were still trying to build new schools as recently as the early 1970s.

Officials in fast growing suburban school districts tend to be concerned about the implications of zoning changes and apartment and townhouse developments for the districts' ratio of assessed property value to the number of students to be served. Important decisions also must be made about where to locate new school buildings, and citizens and board members are not unmindful of the ramifications of these decisions for property values and the ecology of neighborhoods.

With the changeover from growth to decline, however, rather than

planning around, or trying to influence, other peoples' real estate developments (as, for example, through appeals to zoning boards), school officials increasingly find themselves with real estate problems of their own--that is, surplus space and buildings to manage or dispose of. Thus, real estate management and disposal has emerged as a major new problem for school authorities, especially in larger school districts.

Although public schools still can be characterized as "domesticated organizations" assured, in the main, of clients and tax-supplied budgets (Carlson, 1964), declining fiscal support and enrollments show clearly that they also are "open systems" dependent upon, and vulnerable to their environments (Bidwell, 1979; Crespo & Hache, 1982), though not to the same degree as private sector organizations. One aspect of this dependency revealed by school closures is the need for cooperative relations with municipal government and community groups for the recycling or disposal of excess school buildings. In some settings, cooperation and flexibility in zoning adjustments have facilitated creative management of school property disposal. In other locations, rigidity in zoning and resistance to alternative uses of school buildings have stymied property disposal and delayed realization of the associated economic benefits for school districts.

The changeover from growth to decline also has modified the roles of school board members and administrators and has made their jobs more complicated and onerous. In many school districts authorities have had to learn simultaneously how to engage in two new, interrelated processes: cutback management and collective bargaining with teachers. Mistakes made in dealing with either of these processes have serious implications for the successful conduct of the other process. Moreover, the adverse

economic conditions of the 1970s have exacerbated the problems involved in declining enrollments and collective bargaining. As a consequence of these problems and pressures, high level executives and professionals now appear less inclined to serve on school boards because the job has become more time-consuming and unpleasant.

Our data show that the changeover from growth to decline has had different consequences for different types of school districts facing varying configurations of constraints in terms of such factors as facilities, staff age, and conflict management resources and attitudes. In general, though, the onset of decline hit the higher socioeconomic status districts harder than the lower status ones already used to adversity. For instance, declining enrollments enabled less affluent districts to reduce the overcrowding common in their schools. In more affluent districts excess space resulted almost immediately, creating diseconomies. Also, the divisive nature of retrenchment disrupted the consensual mode of policy making favored in higher status districts. Lower status districts, by contrast, were already used to a political bargaining mode of policy making.

Many people assume that fiscal strain is the main determinant of retrenchment policy making and that it is directly related to the level of enrollment decline. Using slow budget growth as a measure of fiscal strain, we found that the degree of strain is not necessarily related to the degree of enrollment decline.[1] Moreover, fiscal strain does not necessarily predict one of the most important responses to declining

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[1] In part 2 of Appendix C, Hentschke and Yagielski argue that inflation is a far more significant cause of fiscal strain than declining enrollments.

enrollments: school closings. These findings indicate that policy making in declining school districts is shaped by a complex configuration of constraints in which enrollment decline and fiscal strain are quite important, but not by themselves necessarily determinative.

Interestingly, however, when we compared our suburban district data with data on ten large, urban school districts, there appeared to be a closer linkage between fiscal strain and school closings in cities than in suburbs. The bulk of the available evidence suggests that large school districts (i.e., cities) tend to experience more conflict in responding to decline and are more inclined to delay action on retrenchment (allowing fiscal strain to increase) than are smaller districts.

A tension exists between the professional advice literature on the management of decline and actual practice. Research shows that the professional advice literature is misguided, at least so far as conflict management is concerned, and that certain kinds of school districts are more likely than others to depart from the advice. Upper status districts are more inclined to follow the recommended rational planning and consensus-building strategy, but it seldom enables them to avoid conflict. Significantly, however, it does provide a sense of legitimacy for the policy-making process and tends to produce results that appear more rational than the ad hoc, accidental, or dilatory policy making which seems characteristic of working class and urban districts. Thus, despite inescapable ambiguities and controversy, efforts to pursue the rational, consensus-building approach are worthwhile, provided that the process is not so protracted that conflict can fester.

Unfortunately, the political and organizational circumstances common to large urban school districts usually overwhelm efforts at a

rational planning approach and make it very difficult to get agreement on the focused cuts necessary for real cutback management. The delay and temporizing about retrenchment which result exacerbate the already serious problems large urban school districts face. By contrast, because of differences in their political and organizational circumstances, small and suburban districts tend to be able to make focused cuts without excessive, harmful delays, though some, of course, fail to do so.

In the high socioeconomic status suburban districts in our study, their plentiful management resources and associated attitudes inclined them to assiduously pursue the rational planning model. Their policy development process for decline thus was characterized by:

(a) extensive data collection and analysis;

(b) considerable use of expertise;

(c) formation of numerous committees and task forces involving citizens and educators;

(d) numerous attempts to clarify and set educational goals; to establish policies and models for systematic and consistent responses to decline-related problems; and to develop and apply criteria for school closing decisions;

(3) extensive public discussion of the problems of decline and of alternative solutions for these problems.

By contrast, in the working class districts in the study, where management resources are scarce, policy development is more inclined toward political bargaining than rational planning. As a result, the process usually was characterized by:

(a) much less data collection and analysis;

(b) little use of expertise;

(c) fewer committees and less citizen involvement;

(d) fewer attempts to clarify or set goals and criteria;

(e) less public discussion, more inclination toward secrecy and suspicion;

(f) more inclination toward ad hoc and accidental policy development;

(g) more overt politics and bargaining.

Though reluctance to give up neighborhood elementary schools was keen everywhere, it was greatest in the working class districts, where it often resulted in accidental policy making: When citizens in such districts persisted in their resistance to school closings or reorganization to age-graded buildings, one of the consequences was that the districts were forced to institute an increasing number of combined-grade classrooms due to the very low enrollments in school buildings. Thus, one form of grade reorganization ironically was adopted, though not the form most educators prefer.

A major conclusion of our research is that the politics of school closings is far more a "divide and conquer" than a "plan and agree" process. The secret of school closings, sensed by some school officials, is concentrated cuts judiciously targeted to minimize the likelihood of the formation of resistance coalitions. There always will be resistance to school closings, but if it is isolated it will have little effect. Significantly, rather than being the artifact of Machiavellian tactics, the isolation of opponents to cutbacks will tend to occur spontaneously when participants truly understand the opportunity costs of not cutting back.

Our analysis shows that small school systems, as most suburban ones are, enjoy an important advantage over large systems in the matter of

school closings. Small districts usually only need to propose closing one or two schools at a time. In large city school systems plagued by decline, however, it is not uncommon for school officials to propose closing a large number of schools simultaneously. This creates the likelihood in cities of coalitions of affected neighborhoods mounting significant opposition to school closing proposals. This difference between large and small school systems provides part of the explanation for the greater difficulties city school districts are having in closing schools.

It seems clear that the most serious consequences of declining enrollments have been felt in large urban school districts, where delay in action on the problem has contributed to program deterioration, fiscal strain, and even, in a few cases, to bankruptcy and receivership. The heart of the problem lies in the nature of the urban political process and the usual structure of incentives facing urban politicians, which discourages prudent fiscal management. What seems needed, therefore, is a restructuring of the urban political incentive system (1) by making it hard to conceal deficits and (2) by providing new, inexpensive political resources to substitute for those now being allocated in the political exchange process.

With the exception of large urban school districts, the organizational consequences of declining enrollments appear considerably more serious than the external political consequences, at least in the short run (cf. Cuban, 1979). In the short term, it appears that when school officials close only one or two schools at a time they generally can ride out the period of angry opposition from citizens whose neighborhood schools are to be closed. Although opponents of closings sometimes can

succeed in electing a representative to the school board, especially in the heat generated by the initial school closings in a district, they rarely can reverse the course of events. In our study, very few school board members or school superintendents lost their positions, over the period from 1971 to 1981, because of actions associated with declining enrollments. Out of the fifteen districts, three districts fired one superintendent each, and one district notorious for its volatility fired three superintendents. Of these six firings, only three can be even partially attributed to decline-related problems. Similar findings in the Washington, D.C. area are reported by Cuban (1979).

Even if the initial political, as opposed to organizational, consequences of declining enrollments are generally slight, it is still clear that neighborhoods that have lost schools have been hurt, at least in the short run. To the extent that school officials anticipate, but wish to avoid, intense controversies over closing neighborhood schools, they may want to consider Gately's (1979) proposal that neighborhoods that lose schools be given a temporary reduction in their school taxes as compensation for the costs imposed specifically on them in the interest of the welfare of the whole school district.

Over the long haul, the political consequences of declining enrollments are sure to be of great significance. Although it has been argued that declining enrollments have not created a new politics of education, but rather have simply produced pressures exposing existing cleavages and activating the traditional patterns of politics found in different kinds of school districts (Iannaccone, 1979), we found strong evidence that declining enrollments have produced a distinctively new politics of education. First, decline has dramatically increased the frequency

of redistributive politics. In the past, middle class suburban school districts usually were able to confine their politics to distributive issues whereas urban districts, due to their greater social heterogeneity, were prone to generate conflict-producing redistributive issues (Weeres, 1971). These differences in patterns of political issues affected how middle class management resources were used in urban and suburban settings. Now, however, suburban districts, as well as urban districts, are confronting frequent redistributive decisions. The plentiful management skills of middle class suburban populations, which used to be employed mainly to minimize conflict, now are being used, in substantial part, to mobilize conflict, i.e., to resist cutbacks. Moreover, redistributive politics have been significantly escalated in large urban districts due to the frequently acute combination of declining enrollments and severe fiscal strain arising from municipal overburden, the high cost of educating disadvantaged urban populations, and a trend toward disinvestment in urban education (Cibulka, 1982a).

Second, declining enrollments and fiscal resources have forced school officials, and other active participants in the policy-making contest, to learn the dynamics of the new game of cutback management. Adaptation to this new game, the distinctive features of which were outlined at the opening of chapter two, has been complicated by its interaction with collective bargaining, which in many school districts was another new process that had to be learned at the same time as cutback management (Murnane, 1981).

Third, the redistributive, zero-sum game produced by declining enrollments and retrenchment has not merely activated old cleavages; it also has created new cleavages. A good example of this is found in

the competition for tight resources between advocates of special and regular educational services. But the most imposing new cleavage is associated with the dramatic changes in the social and fiscal context of public education in the 1970s (Kirst & Garms, 1980). Demographic and economic trends have conspired to substantially reduce the priority that public education can claim on the public fisc. Families with children in the public schools are now a minority group in many school districts. The newest cleavage thus is between the shrinking group of direct beneficiaries of public education and the expanding group of taxpayers and senior citizens who feel that spending for education should be reduced. From the point of view of school governance, this further complicates the already thorny issue of to whom public school systems should be responsive and accountable.

Within school districts, a political "tipping point" often is reached when households without children in the public schools for the first time outnumber those with children in the schools. Although the electoral power of households not utilizing the schools may not be exerted initially, the potential there will affect political calculations for school board elections and referenda. In light of our findings, this tipping point is particularly relevant to the problems of cutback management: When this point is reached the opportunity costs of not cutting back will be more widely perceived and opponents of retrenchment will be more easily isolated. As we saw in our districts, referenda on whether to close schools readily demonstrate this proposition. On the other side of the ledger, however, the task of preserving a high quality school system will be more difficult since school authorities will be dealing with a majority of citizens who are only indirect

beneficiaries of the services of the public schools.

The policies adopted in response to declining enrollments have led to a period of tension and transformation in school-community relations. In many suburban districts there has been a movement away from the once sacrosanct "neighborhood school" concept to a more rural, consolidated type of school attendance area arrangement. Perhaps not surprisingly, this movement generally has been accompanied by a complex symbolic politics regarding the meaning and maintenance of neighborhood schools and neighborhoods. Because neighborhood schools are such a sacred cow in our society, many school administrators prefer not to be explicit about what they are doing. It is easier to avoid the subject or just redefine what they call a "neighborhood school." Consequently, debates about school reorganization alternatives often are blurred by the ambiguous use--both by administrators and citizens--of the symbols of "neighborhoods" and "neighborhood schools."

There is an alternative to this, however, particularly in small school districts. In one small district we studied, school officials have addressed head-on the reality that the concept of neighborhood schools will not be workable in their setting in the 1980s. As a consequence, they have successfully advanced an alternative value scheme in place of the neighborhood school concept: that of the benefits of a more closely knit, better integrated community and school district as a result of a school organization that divides age groupings but not neighborhoods. Thus, with resourcefulness. school officials may be able to successfully invoke new symbols and values to replace old ones no longer viable in contemporary circumstances.

Whether one is explicit about it or not, the movement away from neighborhood schools to "consolidated schools" is likely to have highly significant and probably positive political consequences: Rather than identifying narrowly with the interests of neighborhood schools, parents will be more able to see the broader interests of the whole school system or at least their portion of the consolidated system. This redefinition of the schools' community should reduce factionalism and aid in the development of more unified public support for the schools, a vital consideration in this time of adverse demographic and economic trends.

Another promising sign of positive adjustments to the changing social, economic, and political environment comes as a somewhat unexpected consequence of declining school systems: There appears to be a strengthening of the articulation of local schools with other local community organizations. As some school districts have been forced to shed some of the peripheral activities and services they formerly provided, they have actively sought the help of other community organizations which could provide substitute activities. This could lead to public schools that are narrower, but more focused in their educational purposes and that, at the same time, are better linked to the wider society through stronger ties to other organizations. Consistent with our other findings about the advantages of management resources, however, it appeared that lower socioeconomic status districts were somewhat less likely to develop linkages to other community organizations than were higher socioeconomic status districts.

Among those we interviewed, the most consistently negative assessment of the effects of declining enrollment on the quality of education concerns the impact on teachers. The negative effects on the teaching

profession include the loss of young teachers leaving the profession; the declining quality of people entering the profession; the shift of teachers away from their major areas of competence largely for reasons of job security; the greater possibility of overload and "burnout" in an aging teaching force; and a general lowering of morale and job satisfaction. While these effects are not seen by most respondents as having yet caused major damage to the delivery of quality education, they constitute a cause for some pessimism about the future of public school education unless steps are taken to combat them.

A major effect of decline and retrenchment, alluded to above, has been the reduction or elimination of many enrichment programs, extracurricular activities, and social services offered by the schools. Whether parents, school board members, and administrators believe this is detrimental, neutral or beneficial to the overal functioning of public education depends on what functions and goals of schooling they hold to be of central importance. There was strong disagreement among those we interviewed over whether the core curriculum of the "Three R's" is the overriding concern, or whether, as many educators believe, secondary social and educational services are also of equal importance for the proper development of children. Those who believe schools should concentrate on the core instructional functions of the Three R's are less likely to bemoan the cutting back of what they see as "fat," "fringes," and "frills." But there is also dispute over what constitutes such educational "icing."

In the view of some parents and school officials, programs such as bilingual education, many forms of special education, counselors, social workers and hot lunch programs, are peripheral to the core instructional

tasks of the schools. Those holding this view often feel that state and federal mandates forcing districts to continue such programs during decline detract from the ability to maintain the core instructional programs. Others involved in the school districts, often teachers and more "socially progressive" parents and officials, see the existence of mandates as all that prevents many essential school services from being eliminated during a period of declining enrollment and fiscal strain. Differences in attitude are associated with the kind of children people think the schools should be most responsive to--the "average child" or those with special needs.

Apart from the negative effects on the teaching profession, the other most disturbing development we see involves the implications of the erosion of the school curriculum and associated activities and services. One does not have to look far to see that cutbacks usually come first in what are held to be the "less essential" subjects and services, such as art, music, counselors, and extracurricular activities. Such cutbacks are not to be taken lightly since it has been demonstrated that these "extras," beyond their own value, often play a critical role in creating a sense of school spirit, community, and student commitment to schooling (Garbarino, 1981). Moreover, they frequently are vital in making schooling palatable for many students, and especially so for the more marginal students (Garbarino, 1981). Even if the extracurriculum is not decimated by cutbacks, a related danger is that school closings and consolidations will lead to the creation of still more large schools, which provide settings unconducive to the social and scholastic benefits that have been shown to be associated with small schools (Garbarino, 1981; Lindsay, 1982).

Our data suggest that cutbacks of "extras" are occurring sooner and deeper in lower socioeconomic status, less affluent school districts than in higher socioeconomic status, more affluent ones. The irony, of course, is that higher socioeconomic status parents, as compared with lower socioeconomic status parents, are both more able and more inclined to supplement their children's education and compensate for things unavailable or removed from the schools' offerings. If decline and retrenchment are allowed to proceed without adequate financial equalization efforts by state or federal authorities, the result is likely to be more harmful for less affluent school districts and students than for more affluent ones.

This possibility, and the difficulties of preserving quality education where a majority of citizens are only indirect beneficiaries of the schools, call attention to the profound limits of local control and local funding of public schools (cf. Peterson, 1981). Of course, in the United States local control has been much eroded and local funding accounts for only a portion of educational spending. Nevertheless, under our system of local government and local property taxation, location means resources to an exceptional degree, especially when compared with more centralized systems, such as Australia, where government schools are centrally and equally funded regardless of location. Despite the competition in the U.S. among jurisdictions for desirable residents and business enterprises--and some precariousness in site advantages--differences in resources associated with differences in location shape, to a remarkable degree, school and community adaptation to changing environmental conditions. In the school districts we studied, those with greater fiscal and management resources generally fared better than

less endowed districts in both growth and decline. Although lower socioeconomic status districts often were not as hard hit initially by decline as higher socioeconomic status districts, over the long haul decline will have more adverse effects on them. Unless there are appropriate financial equalization efforts by state or federal authorities, residual local control and "choice" will simply provide another example of the old adage that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

Appendix A

Summary of Original Study

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Although the literature on school politics and community conflict suggests a variety of factors affecting conflict levels (cf. Coleman, 1957), research by David Minar (1966a, 1966b) indicated that the likelihood of high levels of conflict and reduced policy influence and leadership for school administrators varies primarily with the socioeconomic status of communities. In a study of forty-eight nonpartisan Chicago suburban elementary school districts Minar (1966a) found that the twenty-four higher status (white collar) districts had substantially lower levels of electoral conflict (as measured by votes cast for losing candidates) than did the twenty-four lower status (blue collar) districts. In addition, he found that the school superintendents in lower status districts were much more likely to have minor administrative decisions and policies questioned by their school boards than were their counterparts in the higher status districts.

From these and other related data, Minar concluded that the variable which could best account for his findings was the differential possession by higher and lower status school districts of resources of conflict management skills in their respective populaces. By conflict management resources, Minar meant the aggregate organizational and management skills and associated attitudes derived from the level of education and the kinds of occupations of a given populace. Minar hypothesized (1966a, p. 827) that the greater possession of management resources (including skills in such areas as "communication, negotiation, persuasion, division of labor, and delegation of function") by higher than by lower status

districts promoted deference to expertise (that is, deference to professional administrators) in the former districts and tended to lead to a controlling and channelling of the educational decision-making process (especially by means of the use of nominating caucuses for the selection of school board candidates) in such a way as to minimize conflict. Conversely, Minar argued that the paucity of management resources in lower status districts is likely to reduce deference to expertise, increase school board and citizen interference in essentially administrative, as opposed to policy, matters, and reduce the community's ability to contain and control conflict.

In a followup comparative case study of four of the original forty-eight districts, Minar (1966b) and Snow (1966) explored the validity of the "conflict management resources" hypothesis and concluded that it was essentially correct. Observation of school board meetings and data on the division of labor and working relationships between school boards and their superintendents showed systematic differences in the patterns of policy making and conflict management between the two high status and the two low status districts selected for study which were consistent with the hypothesis.* More specifically, Snow (1966), in his study of the same four districts under the direction of Minar--a study which also included a comparison of school and municipal policy making in the same communities--found support for the following hypotheses:

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*In small, relatively homogeneous communities such as those studied by Minar, and by the writer (Boyd, 1973), the socioeconomic status of school board members usually is consistent with that predominant in the community as a whole.

1. The higher a community falls on a dimension of social rank (status) the lower will be its conflict potential. . .
2. The lower the conflict potential in a community, the greater will be the reliance on experts (i.e., school superintendents and city managers) as opposed to holders of rank authority (i.e., school board members and city councilmen).
3. Reliance on administrative expertise will be manifest in high-status, low-conflict communities by the following evidences:
   a. More supports and fewer constraints imposed upon roles of expertise in the attitudes and expectations expressed in the community;
   b. Longer tenure and higher salary for administrators;
   c. More institutionalized procedures of expert and staff selection;
   d. More bureaucratic development (larger staffs);
   e. More stable-less hostile working relationships between experts and policy bodies as community representatives;
   f. Greater reliance on experts for policy initiation and development, especially in the more technical areas of administration such as personnel and budgeting;
   g. Less inclination on the parts of policy bodies to be actively interested in the districts' administrative affairs;
   h. More policy body consensus on expectations of administrators;

i. Greater participation and contribution from technical experts in formal decision sites;

j. More accuracy in defining community and policy body expectations on the part of the expert himself, and thus great accuracy in fitting role behavior to expectations (Snow, 1966, pp. 16-18).

While the evidence Mirar and Snow present showing systematic differences in patterns of policy making and conflict management between higher and lower status districts is impressive, their explanation of these patterns as largely a consequence of differential possession of management resources is less convincing. Because Minar chose to select for in-depth study two high status/low conflict districts and two low status/high conflict districts, there was no common effect between the pairs of districts. By not including what according to the conflict management resources hypothesis would be the deviant cases (that is, high status/high conflict districts and low status/low conflict districts), the design of the study tended to make the rejection of the hypothesis unlikely. This is a troublesome point for it is apparent that the management resources of citizens frequently are used to mobilize and intensify conflict rather than to suppress it. Moreover, political and sociological theory suggest at least five plausible rival explanations, some of which Minar acknowledged and considered within the limitations of his data and research design (Boyd, 1976a).

Therefore, the original or baseline study (Boyd, 1973, 1976a) sought to test Minar's hypothesis in a comparative case study design which included deviant as well as nondeviant cases, and which provided

for opportunities to test alternative explanations for Minar and Snow's findings. In order to accomplish these ends, a sample of eight districts was selected from the top and bottom fourths of a ranking, on 1960 median family income, of all 118 Cook County (Chicago) suburban elementary school districts to provide pairs of districts to fill the cells of a fourfold typology (see Figure 1) of community status (see also Tables 1 and 2) and known conflict (as indicated by performances in referenda from 1963-1968). Since capacity to finance education may influence conflict levels, and this capacity (as expressed in assessed valuation per pupil) may vary independently of community status (due to differences in the business/industrial tax base between communities), the sample also was chosen to provide variation on assessed valuation per pupil within cells in order to enable some ability to control for this factor (see Table 3 and Figure 2).

Space limitations here prohibit an extensive account of the methods and findings of the study, but it may be helpful to present a summary. To begin with, analysis of voting behavior and the case study data (assembled for the period 1964-1969) on issues prompting conflict (collected by means of interviews with core participants and a review of documentary sources) indicated that the differences between higher and lower status districts in conflict levels were not due primarily to economic differences in ability to finance education. Differences in conflict levels also could not be accounted for in terms of measures of differences between districts in three generic categories of structural features of communities which may promote or inhibit the incidence and intensity of conflict, e.g., socially fragmented vs. well integrated communities, etc. (cf. Coleman, 1957; Gamson, 1966).

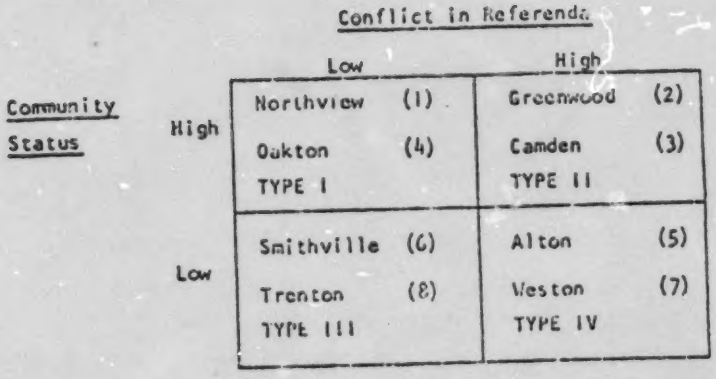

Figure 1: DISTRICTS SELECTED CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY STATUS (RANKED BY NUMBER) AND CONFLICT IN REFERENDA

TABLE 1

Selected Data Reflecting Community Status and the Availability of Conflict Management Resources

District Type	Northview I	Greenwood II	Camden II	Oakton I	Alton IV	Smithville III	Weston IV	Trenton III
Education: Proportion of the total population 25 and over who are:								
Elementary Educated:	11	20	16	19	35	37	34	49
High School Educated:	28	34	45	53	53	49	58	40
College Educated:	61	46	38	28	11	14	8	6
Income: Proportion of all families with 1959 annual income levels:								
Less than $7,000	15	32	19	23	41	44	43	51
$7,000 to $9,999	8	16	24	35	34	31	37	29
$10,000 or more	77	62	57	41	24	26	20	20
Employment: Proportion of total employed persons in the following job classifications:								
Craftsman, Operatives, or Laborers	6	15	18	32	48	42	59	59
Professional-Managerial:	49	40	43	28	14	18	10	9

[a]Source: U.S. Census, 1960, Tables P-1 and P-3.

TABLE 2

SELECTED DATA REFLECTING SCHOOL DISTRICT STATUS

District	Type	1960[a] Median Family Income	1960[a] Median Years of Education	1966[b] Median Family Income	1966[b] Average Value of Homes	1966[c] Decile Rank - 166 Communities	1966[b] Decile Rank - 250 Communities
1. Northview	I	$20,004	14.4	$25,720	$39,274	1	1
2. Greenwood	II	13,007	12.9	17,220	34,265	1	1
3. Camden	II	10,765	12.6	13,650	31,137	2	1
4. Oakton	I	9,315	12.4	-	-	-	-
5. Alton	IV	7,616	10.6	9,450	18,960	6	6
6. Smithville	III	7,576	10.9	8,920	16,830	8	8
7. Weston	IV	7,454	10.4	-	-	-	-
8. Trenton	III	7,361	9.4	8,400	18,030	9	8

[a]Source: U.S. Census, 1960.

[b]Source: Pierre de Vise, Chicago's Widening Color Gap (Chicago: Interuniversity Social Research Committee, Report No. 2, December, 1967), pp. 147-150 and 153-158. de Vise provides an economic ranking of the 250 incorporated communities of 2,500 or more people in the Chicago metropolitan area. This ranking, based on median family income, average value of homes, and assessed real estate valuations per person or median rent, includes 166 suburban municipalities and 84 community areas within the city of Chicago.

[c]Source: de Vise's economic ranking of the 166 Chicago suburban communities with populations of 2,500 or more as given in an article by Van Gordon Sauter, "How High Are You On Suburb Totem Pole?" in the Chicago Daily News, May 8, 1967.

Note:

The boundaries of Districts 2, 5, and 6 are not coterminous with the applicable communities ranked by de Vise. Thus, his data and rankings are only partly applicable and suggestive of the social status of these districts. Districts 4 and 7 are wholly or largely unincorporated areas and hence are not ranked by de Vise.

TABLE 3

SELECTED 1968 FISCAL DATA ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS RANKED ACCORDING TO 1960 MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME[a]

District	Type	1968 Average Daily Attendance	1968 Assessed Valuation Per Pupil	1968 Assessed Valuation Per Pupil Quartile[b]	1968 Total School Tax Rate Quartile[b]
1. Northview	I	1,900	$ 38,000	2	1
2. Greenwood	II	1,200	45,000	1	1
3. Camden	II	6,000	30,000	2	2
4. Oakton	I	6,500	20,000	3	1
5. Alton	IV	2,500	70,000	1	4
6. Smithville	III	3,000	24,000	3	2
7. Weston	IV	5,500	16,000	3	3
8. Trenton	III	1,800	42,000	1	2

[a]Source: Data obtained from U.S. Census, 1960; and from Cook County Superintendent of Schools Office.

[b]Quartile rankings indicate the positions of the districts on the given variable among all 118 elementary school districts in Cook County.

Community Status	Property Wealth: High	Property Wealth: Low
High	Greenwood (1) Northview (2) Camden (2)	Oakton (3)
Low	Alton (1) Trenton (1)	Smithville (3) Weston (3)

Figure 2: DISTRICTS CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY STATUS AND PROPERTY WEALTH (1968 QUARTILE POSITION ON ASSESSED VALUATION PER PUPIL AMONG ALL 118 COOK COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICTS)

Instead, the major finding of the study was that the political traditions and values or "political culture" of the districts was equally as important as their relative possession of management resources and indeed, was more significant in "explaining" much of the variance in conflict levels, especially since it tended to determine how management resources were used (i.e., to mobilize or to minimize conflict). Thus, the fundamental difference between the blue collar and white collar districts lay in their different norms and values regarding conflict and the proper conduct of politics. The existence of distinctively different political cultures in the blue collar and white collar districts was indicated both by extensive case data linking the differences in political behavior to attitudes and values, and by the nature of the systematic patterns of behavior, which conformed to a remarkable degree with behavior associated by Banfield and Wilson (1963) with what they have described as the "public" and "private-regarding" political cultures.

Before proceeding further, we wish to acknowledge quickly that Banfield and Wilson's "political ethos" or culture "theory" has become quite controversial among political scientists. Indeed, a whole literature has sprung up on the subject, much of it critical of the conception (e.g., Hennessy, 1970). But even if the political ethos theory does not provide a powerful tool for comprehending American city politics generally, the fact remains that it fits the data in our original study extraordinarily well and seems applicable, at the least, to the political patterns found in and around many older American cities in the Northeast and Midwest.

Banfield and Wilson contend that the various social cleavages in American cities and metropolitan areas tend to coalesce into two basic

opposing patterns (or political cultures) deriving from the "fundamental cleavage between the public-regarding, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, middle-class ethos and the private-regarding, lower-class, immigrant ethos" (Banfield & Wilson, 1963, pp. 40ff). The public-regarding political culture emphasizes the values of the Reform movement, e.g., "good government," efficiency, and the disinterested support of the broad public interest. By contrast, the private-regarding culture, which is associated with "machine" politics, seeks personal benefits and favors from the political system and identifies with the ward or neighborhood rather than the community as a whole. While the private-regarding culture recognizes the legitimacy of competition and conflict between groups concerned with narrow and special interests, the public-regarding culture takes "the view that politics, rather than being a struggle among partial and private interests is (or at any rate ought to be) a disinterested effort to discover what is best for the community 'as a whole'" (p. 154).

Thus, while we agree that the availability of management resources has much to do with the structuring of the political process of school district governance, our data (Boyd, 1973, 1976a) strongly suggest that the crucial rules of the game affecting the process derive more from the cultural ethos than from perspectives associated with the level of management resources available. On the basis of Banfield and Wilson's description of their "political ethos" theory, the rules of the game which differentiate the public and private-regarding cultures appear to vary along four major dimensions: (1) the extent to which competition and politics are viewed as legitimate; (2) the extent to which the

public interest is defined in terms of the whole community; (3) the extent to which honesty, impartiality, and disinterested participation are expected; and (4) the extent to which efficiency and expertise in governance are valued.

In brief, we found, in regard to the first dimension above, that while in the white collar districts politics in its broadest sense was shunned as unseemly, and tended to be viewed as unnecessary and improper because it was believed that a common interest could and should be defined, in the blue collar districts competing interests and points of view tended to be an accepted fact of life and the competitive aspects of educational decision making (e.g., school board elections and controversial issues) provided an enjoyable diversion and activity for many people.

Concerning the second dimension, we found that, unlike the white collar districts, in the blue collar districts positions taken by groups on issues were seldom substantively developed or symbolically advanced in terms of "what's best for the whole community." Also, we found that groups and individuals were inclined to manifest, both in words and deeds, a pronounced allegiance to subcommittees. The latter point was demonstrated, for example, by the lack of unity of PTAs, the tendency by school board members to represent the interests of sub-areas and groups, and the prominence of "name-voting" on the basis of ethnicity and/or religion.

In regard to the third dimension, unlike their counterparts in the white collar districts, board members in the blue collar districts

tended both to expect and receive requests for favoritism (e.g., in the allocation of noncertified positions and contracts) from their constituents, and some board members tried to grant these requests in an effort to increase their political support. Furthermore, a history of patronage and corruption in local government, in recent as well as past years, contributed to an atmosphere of distrust of public officials which reduced willingness to delegate authority and defer to expertise in blue collar districts.

Finally, both the paucity of management resources in blue collar districts and the character of their political culture described in the three dimensions above combined to minimize the extent to which efficiency and expertise in governance were valued. By contrast, plentiful management resources and a strong sense of "public-regardingness" tended to maximize the emphasis on these values in white collar districts. In sum, the combined effect of the political culture and management resources in the white collar districts tended to minimize conflict and maximize the effectiveness of the role of the superintendent as an "educational statesman." On the other hand, the reverse was true in the blue collar districts, where the superintendents generally were pressed to adopt the role of a "political strategist."

Although the deviant cases were similar to their nondeviant counterparts in political culture and management resources, the chief factor which set them apart was the quality of leadership by their school authorities. The low status/low conflict districts enjoyed unusually skilled political leadership, while the high status/high conflict districts

suffered from inept leadership which often provoked or contributed to conflict. However, the leadership factor did not by itself account for all of the difference. Ideological tensions between conservatives and liberals contributed to the high level of conflict in one of the high status/high conflict districts. And, the two low status/ low conflict districts had in common not only astute leadership but also a distribution of the electorate within their boundaries which enabled the largest subcommunity in each district to control district decision making, an accomplishment which was facilitated by the presence of a single dominant local political party in each district. (For further data in support of these conclusions, and for extensive case study data illustrating the character of the political cultures, see Boyd, 1973, 1976a.)

Appendix B

Interviews and Fieldwork

Part I: Methodology

Part II: Interview Schedules

Methodology

In the course of this study, we conducted over one hundred-fifty in-depth interviews with core actors in, and observers of, current and past school district and associated community events, including: (a) school board members; (b) superintendents and other central office administrators; (c) school principals; (d) teachers union leaders; and (e) parent leaders.

The first wave of interviews were conducted by the Principal Investigator in 1977 as he was setting up the NIE-funded study and securing official agreement from the school districts to participate in the proposed study. At that time he interviewed the superintendents and two or more board members in each district. The second wave of interviews began in 1979 after the field researchers were familiar with events in their assigned districts.* Although there were several exceptions, normally most or all district board members were interviewed first; then arrangements were made through the district central offices to interview the superintendent, two principals (one from a school being closed and one from a school receiving pupils and personnel from a closed school, when possible), two teachers union leaders, and two parent leaders in each school district.

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* Initially, two part-time research assistants were hired to conduct the field work in the Chicago area and one part-time research assistant was employed for the Marasmus area. It quickly became apparent, however, that on a part-time basis these researchers could not adequately cover board meetings, conduct interviews, and construct case histories for so many school districts. Consequently, three more part-time researchers were hired, two for Chicago and one for Marasmus.

The interview schedules (which follow in Part II of this Appendix) consisted primarily of open-ended questions, some of which were asked of all persons interviewed, and some of which were tailored to fit individual categories of actors. In addition, interviewers added questions both to bring out discussion of important problems and particular events in each district, and to follow up fruitful lines of inquiry opened up in answer to the standardized questions. There was wide variation in the responses given to the questions. Some informants were quite willing to explain their views on district events in great detail, and some interviews run over twenty double-spaced typed pages. Other informants were quite terse and offered little spontaneous comment, and such interviews are sometimes less than five pages long.

A number of the interview questions focused on the positive and negative effects of declining enrollments and finances on school governance and policy-making, on delivery of educational services, on the children and their families, on the staff, on the communities served by the schools, and on the overall functioning of the school systems. Many other aspects of the consequences of decline-related issues on local community life and organization were brought out in the interviews and are included in the data used in this study.

In practice, the interviews were conducted in each district by the field worker who had for the previous months or years been observing school board meetings, gathering data from official school district records in the administration building, and following local community newspapers covering district affairs. Therefore, each field worker was well informed about past and current events in each district. Because the teachers, principals, and parents interviewed were in most cases suggested by the district superintendents (the teachers and parents were in

some cases suggested by principals), there was likely an element of bias in the selection of these informants. This appeared to have actually happened in a few instances, such that the informant's perspective and analysis of events closely paralleled that of the administration; but the effect was counterbalanced by five factors.

First, there was the stress put on the strict confidentiality and anonymity of the responses and their sources before the interviews began. Although some informants did not care who knew what they said to us, others were clearly only willing to speak frankly after receiving such assurances. Second, the field researchers had in many cases observed the informants in board meetings, etc., and were already familiar with their positions on controversial issues. Third, the field researchers were informed in district issues and so could tailor questions to take advantage of the strongly held opinions of some informants and bring out more fully the reasons behind such opinions. Fourth, by specifying teachers union leaders, and principals of closing and receiving schools, district officials could not avoid referring us often to people with views independent of, and sometimes directly opposing, the administration and/or majority board members. Fifth, we tried to interview as many board members as possible, and that guaranteed that minority opinions were expressed in districts with conflicting views represented on the board.

The nervousness of several administrators about our interviewing specific people in some of these districts validates the representativeness of the opinions and positions expressed in the

interviews obtained as much as any tightly imposed methodology could have insured.* The most compelling argument for the validity of the bulk of these interviews, however, is that they ring true to the ears of the field researchers who spent much time and energy observing and studying the various districts. It is often very easy to spot a personal gripe, a special interest dominating a broader evaluation, an ideological position framing the perception of events.

Such a copious amount of qualitative data as is contained in these interviews is unmanagable without some systematic organization, topic classification scheme, and retrieval mechanism. Old-fashioned McBee cards worked admirably to provide all these services. Passages containing internally coherent statements were entered on individual McBee cards and coded using a multiple topic and informant identification code involving over ninety categories of subject matter. For Chapter five, topics relating to consequences of decline on various aspects of the delivery of educational services and the quality of the schools and curriculums were selected for retrieval and analysis.

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* In only one case was a request for an interview refused: Mr. Fisk, the locally powerful Trenton school board member who has often succeeded in controlling that school board's major decisions for over twenty years, refused to be interviewed by Boyd a decade ago and again refused to be interviewed in the present study. But years of observing him in school board meetings, and hearing evaluations of him from friends and foes, all helped justify the feeling that his role and positions are well understood and represented in the data base.

Interview Schedules

School Board Members

Introduction

As you know, we are studying how school districts are coping with the problems of declining enrollments. Because the alternatives open to school districts are affected by other problems and constraints they face--for example in state aid, union contracts, and budgetary matters--we also are interested in other problems and issues faced by school boards at the same time that they must deal with declining enrollments. The findings of our study should be useful because they should help illuminate the consequences of decline and retrenchment and the kinds of approaches which are effective in dealing with these problems.

All answers in our interview will be treated in a confidential manner. The results of our study will be presented in an anonymous or a statistical form. If you don't mind, I would like to make notes as we talk so that I will have an accurate record of our interview.

Questions

1. First, how long have you lived in the school district?
2. How long have you been active in school affairs and in what capacity?
3. a. Could you begin by telling me what you think have been the main consequences of declining enrollments in your district?
   b. Do you see any positive consequences of declining enrollments? (If so, what are they?)
   c. What have the consequences been for children in the schools and for the nature of the educational program delivered to them?

4. a. What do you see as the positive and negative--if any--consequences of policies adopted or steps taken by the district in response to declining enrollments? (Probe for the specifics of any of these that are identified.)

   b. What have been the consequences of policies or steps taken for children in the schools and the nature of the educational program delivered to them?

5. Are there any things that you feel the district (a) should have done or (b) should not have done in response to declining enrollments? (What and why? Get specifics.)

6. What problems, related to declining enrollments, have you had in dealing with (a) students, (b) parents, (c) teachers, (d) administrators, or (e) other board members?

7. (If not already identified by respondent:) What are the main problems or issues which have arisen because of declining enrollments and funds?

8. What alternative solutions for these problems or issues has the board considered? Who suggested these alternative solutions or where did they come from?

9. What was the final solution (or solutions) adopted and why was it selected?

10. What do you think are the most important problems or issues that now face your district--or are likely soon to face your district?

11. Has the process of making "hard choices" due to the pressures of declining enrollments resulted in any refinement or alteration of the school district's goals or objectives? (If so, what specifically?)

    a. (For example:) Has the school district had to choose to cut, consolidate, or eliminate any educational programs?

b. The growth of a few programs, such as special education, has received a lot of emphasis recently, especially by way of new state and federal requirements. Has this created a problem in maintaining other programs, such as art, music, and physical education?

12. Ask specific questions for that district.

School Principals

Introduction (same as for school board members)

Questions

1. a. How long have you been in your current position?

b. How long have you been in the school district?

c. What was your previous position?

We are interested in learning about the consequence of declining enrollments and the consequences of steps taken by the school district in response to declining enrollments. These consequences affect children, families, neighborhoods, schools, teachers, administrators, and the overall functioning of the school system.

2. a. Could you begin by telling me what you think have been the main consequences of declining enrollments in your district?

b. Do you see any positive consequences of declining enrollments? (If so, what are they?)

c. What have the consequences been for children in the program and for the nature of the educational program delivered to them?

3. a. What do you see as the positive and negative--if any--consequences of policies adopted or steps taken by the district in response to declining enrollments? (Probe for the specifics of any of these that are identified.)

b. What have been the consequences of policies or steps taken for children in the schools and the nature of the educational program delivered to them?

4. Are there any things that you feel the district (a) should have done or (b) should not have done in response to declining enrollments? (What and why? Get specifics.)

5. What problems, related to declining enrollments, have you had in dealing with (a) students, (b) parents, (c) teachers, (d) other administrators, or (e) the school board?

6. What can a principal do in coping with the effects of declining enrollments?

7. What kinds of changes might help you, in your role as principal, in responding to the problems of decline?

8. Ask specific questions for that district.

Superintendents

Introduction (same as for school board members)

Questions

1. Would you please summarize your view of recent developments in your district related to declining enrollments?

2-4. Same questions, plus the explanatory paragraph, as for school principals. Note, however, that question 4 should be modified to read: "With the benefit of 'twenty-twenty hindsight,' are there any things that you feel the district should have done or should not have done ..."

5. What kinds of changes--for example, in state or federal policies--might help school officials in dealing with the problems of declining enrollments?

6. Ask specific questions for that district.

Teachers Association Leaders

Introduction (same as for school board members)

Questions

1. a. How long have you taught in this school district?

   b. How long have you been active in the teachers association and in what capacities?

2-4. Same questions, plus the explanatory paragraph, as for school principals.

5. What problems, related to declining enrollments, has the teachers association had in dealing with (a) school principals, (b) the school superintendent and central office staff, (c) the school board, and (d) students, parents, and community residents?

6. What do you see as the teachers association's role in coping with the effects of declining enrollments?

7. What kinds of changes might help the association in responding to the problems of decline?

8. Ask specific questions for that district.

School District Parent Leaders

Introduction (same as for school board members)

Questions

1. a. How long have you lived in this school district?

   b. How long have you been active in school affairs and in what capacities?

2-4. Same questions, plus the explanatory paragraph, as for school principals.

5. What problems, if any, related to declining enrollments, are there for parents in dealing with (a) teachers, (b) school principals, (c) the superintendent and central office staff, (d) the school board, and (e) any cost conscious groups in the community?

6. Ask specific questions for that district.

APPENDIX C

Measuring Fiscal Strain and Understanding Its Causes

Part I: Fiscal Strain in Public School Districts

by

Guilbert C. Hentschke

Part II: School District Fiscal Strain: Past and Future

by

Guilbert C. Hentschke

and

John Yagielski

Fiscal Strain in Public School Districts

by

Guilbert C. Hentschke

University of Rochester

There is currently no consensus as to a valid measure of fiscal strain in public school districts, although there is a wide agreement that school district administrators are facing greater fiscal pressures currently than in the past. What are the most prevalent measures of fiscal strain and what are the theoretical shortcomings of each? These questions help determine the validity and utility of research on "decline": research on schools which utilizes a particular measure of fiscal strain will yield findings which will vary depending upon which measure is chosen. If for no other reason than this, the options available to the educational researcher for measuring fiscal strain should evaluated.

Measuring Without Explicit Theories

There are two major perspectives, one or both of which undergird most discussions of fiscal strain. The first views school district operating officials (central office administrators) as having little discretion in spending and in generating revenue. They are bound by labor contracts, state requirements to provide certain services, enrollments, legal or political limits on taxing ability, and other constraints which essentially remove financial discretion of administrators. The relevant factors affecting funds flow in school districts are determined outside of the decision-making authority of district administrators.

Because these exogenous factors do not have equal impacts across school districts, the argument goes, districts are affected differentially. When

those factors exogenous to a school district cause expenditures to increase (and revenues to decrease) faster than expenditures to decrease (and revenues to increase), the district suffers a relative increase in fiscal strain.

In order to assess the amount of a district's fiscal strain researchers examine changes in these exogenous factors--factors which implicitly or explicitly cause greater reductions in revenues or increases in expenditures than would have been the case had those factors not changed. Thus, when confronted with two otherwise identical districts and observing that one of the districts lost enrollments over a year and the other did not, we conclude that the district which lost enrollments suffered greater financial strain (due to losses in state aid, large proportions of fixed costs, and the implication of decline in support for schools among local taxpayers). The design is reflected in studies which emphasize single exogenous forces which cause changes in revenues/expenditures, e.g., changes in enrollments, changes in tax rates, changes in assessed valuation per pupil.

This measure of fiscal strain--the "exogenous factors" measure--suffers from several theoretical as well as operational shortcomings, especially when one is seeking to compare fiscal strain among school districts. First, it does not specify whose strain. Instead, the school district takes on an anthropomorphic character, "suffering" when externally imposed reductions take place. Even if there were a direct relationship between enrollment declines and "fiscal strain," there is no reason to believe that it would affect all people or programs equally. Highly experienced, tenured teachers may be relatively unaffected compared to young, untenured teachers. To say that a district suffers fiscal strain due to enrollment declines is vague and unrevealing. Further, there can

be no theoretical statement of "school district behavior" which links enrollment declines to strain.

Even the link between enrollment changes and changes in revenues/expenditures is difficult to trace over time. Unless it is integrated into a complex model which monitors changes in all major exogenous forces, the measure is a poor one.

The major problem with most single measures of strain used heretofore is that it is as easy to arrive at conclusions opposite of strain as it is to presume that the measures cause strain. Under certain assumptions, enrollment declines could result in higher levels of service for those students remaining. Higher tax rates could reflect increases in taste for education as well as a response to fiscal strain. Increases in short-term debt could reflect lack of fiscal control and ease of access to financial markets as well as a response to fiscal strain. Reliance on largely exogenous measures precludes a formal statement of a theory of motivation of the individuals supposedly under strain. Use of only one or a few such measures, without a theoretically defensible rationale, merely results in even less valid empirical results.

The second method of measuring fiscal strain, and the one originally proposed in this study (and subsequently abandoned), attempted to overcome the problems associated with using one or more strictly exogenous variables. The specific methodology is reported elsewhere (Antschke, Educational Economics, May-June, 1977, pp. 10-15). Essentially it attempted to integrate those endogenous and exogenous variables faced by the "district decisionmakers." In several respects it represented a step in the right direction. First it attempted formally to include all of the major factors which would cause expenditures/revenues to change over time and delineated those factors over which district level decision

makers exerted "control." Variables in the model include cost determinants such as staffing ratios, costs of inputs such as teachers' salaries, enrollments, inflation rates, assessed valuation, state aid, and tax levies. Like earlier efforts this model recognized the importance of exogenous variables, but it also incorporated variables over which district decision makers have discretion, e.g., cost determinants and tax levy. Further, in this formulation strain is associated with a specific group of individuals, e.g., those with the authority to set tax rates and determine changes in technology, such as staffing ratios, etc.

The link to fiscal strain is more intimate in this model. For example, the impact of enrollment decline is considered jointly with other exogenous factors such as state aid changes and assessed valuation changes. The final step of the model calculates changes in tax rates required to maintain existing technology and reflects changes in exogenous variables such as enrollment changes, assessed valuation changes, etc.

The model yields a measure of fiscal strain: it is the difference between what the tax rate would have been in year one, if all other factors had been held constant in year zero, versus what the tax rate in year one actually became. The original presumption implicit in the model is that if the actual tax rate was greater than the expected tax rate, district decision makers were experiencing fiscal strain. They had to increase taxes merely to "stay even." The greater the difference between the two taxes, the greater the strain. Districts in which the actual tax rate in year one was less than the expected tax rate in year one experienced the opposite of fiscal strain.

This approach to fiscal strain, through a more comprehensive measure of changes in financial condition, suffers from two shortcomings--one superficial and the other severe. At the superficial level, district

decision makers can respond to changes in exogenous forces by means of methods other than tax rates. They can modify technology (e.g., reduce staff, close schools, etc.) in a variety of ways. This problem by itself is not fatal. The combined effect of changes in technology and tax rates can be calculated.

The fundamental problem with this model is that the assumptions of district decision-maker motivation have still not been stated. Implicit in the model is the assumption that district decision makers raise taxes only as a last resort and in response to fiscal strain. Most discussions of administrative behavior in public settings arrive at the opposite conclusion with regard to the motivation of public officials, i.e., that public officials are budget maximizers and increase budgets via tax rate increases as much as they feel they can.

The weakness in our initial measure of fiscal strain is attributable largely to an absence of a theoretical understanding of "fiscal motivation," i.e., the fiscal objectives that public officials pursue. Fiscal strain occurs when those objectives are thwarted. The fiscal strain measures considered heretofore portray school district decision-making as essentially a mechanical process. Enrollment changes, for example, have a well-defined algebraic relationship to expenditures and revenues. Not considered are the many decisions--large and small--made during a year, which reflect responses to those exogenous variables and reveal the preferences of district decision makers. Measures of fiscal strain have meaning only when accompanies by a coherent thesis about what motivates district decision makers. This is addressed below.

Fiscal Strain and a Theory of District Administrative Behavior

The presumptions put forth in this section are that district decision makers are motivated to maximize the size of their annual budgets and that fiscal strain is most accurately portrayed as the degree to which total budgets are not increased. The arguments to support these presumptions are drawn largely from William Niskanen (Bureaucracy and Representative Government, Chicago, Aldine, 1971; and Bureaucracy: Servant or Master, London, The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1973.) Niskanen's portrayal of the Bureau head fits our definition of public school decision makers.

Public school districts are "bureaus" in the sense that:

1) employees cannot appropriate any part of the difference between revenues and costs as personal income; and
2) a relatively large part of recurring revenues derive from "grants," i.e., not from tuition revenues from students.

Bureaucrats are (or quickly become) representatives of and advocates for the bureaus they head. Their primary relations are with the organizations that provide their large recurring appropriations (the state and local district in the case of public schools). The activities of district-level decision makers are largely dominated by their relations with officers of the sponsoring organization. District-level decision makers offer a promised set of educational activities to the local municipality in exchange for a budget:

> The bureau's characteristic package offer of a promised output for a budget has important implications for the behavior of bureaus. Under many conditions it gives a bureau the same type of bargaining power as a profit-seeking monopoly that discriminates among customers or that presents the market with an all-or-nothing choice. The primary reason for the differential bargaining power of a monopoly bureau is the sponsor's lack of a significant alternative and its unwillingness to forgo the services supplied by the bureau. Also, the interests of those officers of the

> collective organization responsible for reviewing the bureau are often best served by allowing the bureau to exploit this monopoly power. (Niskanen, Bureaucracy: Servant or Master?, pp. 6-30)

Given this situation, what do district-level decision makers seek to maximize? The objective of his counterpart--the profit-seeking manager--is widely assumed to be maximization of the net present value of future flows of revenue. "There may be elements to his utility other than personal income, but there are no prior assumptions that he has any personal interest in either efficiency or the general welfare; for some conditions these may be consequences of his purposive behavior, but are not the objectives." (ibid., p. 21). School district decision makers are also purposive, utility maximizing individuals. However, the arguments posited for profit maximization do not strictly apply to the bureaucrat. The bureaucrat seeks to maximize his budget, not the net present value of future flows. Why? Niskanen posits arguments based on "rationality" and the "will to survive."

Consider first the rationality argument:

> Among the several variables that may enter the bureaucrat's motives are: salary, perquisites of the office, public reputation, power, patronage, output of the bureau, ease of making changes, and ease of managing the bureau. All except the last two are a positive function of the total budget of the bureau during the bureaucrat's tenure. The problems of making changes and the personal burdens of managing a bureau are often higher at higher budget levels, but both are reduced by <u>increases</u> in the budget." (Ibid, p. 22)

Budget maximization may or may not be consistent with higher level goals.

Niskanen's survival argument reinforces the budget maximization assumption. The employees of the school district as well as state education officials influence the district decision maker to maximize budgets. Their reasons for encouraging him to maximize budgets are different but reinforcing. The behavior of employees depends on their perceived

rewards of employment in the school district. "They [the employees] can be cooperative, responsive, and efficient. Or they can deny information to the [district decision maker], undermine his directives, and embarrass him before the constituency and officers of the collective organization" (ibid., p. 24). The employees' interests in larger budgets are easy to comprehend. They are directly correlated with increased opportunities for promotion, more job security, etc.

Niskanen's "collective organization" or sponsor is analogous to the community in which the school district is located and, to a lesser degree, to state government. Both levels support budget maximization by the district decision makers. Both expect the district decision maker to propose aggressively more activities and higher budgets. Indeed, they would not otherwise know how to perform their review role.

> If the agencies suddenly reversed roles and sold themselves short, the entire pattern of natural expectations would be upset, leaving the participants without an anchor in a sea of complexity. For if agencies refuse to be advocates, legislators would not only have to choose among the margins of the best programs placed before them; they would also have to discover what these good programs might be. (Aaron Wildavsky, "Budgeting," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York: The Macmillan Co., Vol. 2, 1968, p. 192)

The same holds true for school district decision makers. They are advocates for school programs, and hence for larger budgets.

Constraints on Budget Maximization

To state that district level decision makers desire to maximize budgets does not imply that they can always increase the size of their budgets. There are inherent limits to budget size, the most fundamental of which is the expected level of output by the school district. Members of a community collectively determine at the margin the amounts of schooling which will be provided by government. The "voting" process yields a level of financial support for schools in exchange for a promised set of

activities. When districts repeatedly do not deliver the promised set of activities year after year or when the voters, for any reason, vote for a reduced level of activities, financial support will fall. These forces do not, however, alter the preferences of district-level decision makers.

A Measure of Fiscal Strain

It follows from this discussion that the most appropriate measure of fiscal strain for district decision makers is percent change in total budget. The smaller the positive (or greater the negative) change, the more fiscal strain is experienced by district-level decision makers. Other measures represent less valid proxies of the concept in that (1) they only indirectly reflect changes in budgets, or (2) they bear no relation to budgets and budget changes.

Fiscal Strain and Causes of Dissatisfaction with Public Schools

Some discussions suggest that districts with greater fiscal strain will show evidence of greater overt dissatisfaction with schooling. This hypothesis is based on the presumption that district-level decision makers are essentially mechanistic reactors to external forces which drive changes in expenditures and revenues. Fiscal strain in this portrayal is devoid of any theory of managerial behavior. Further, overt dissatisfaction with public schools is presumed to stem largely from this mechanistic relationship.

If this formulation of social behavior approximately represented reality it would seem that we should be able to observe the absence of overt dissatisfaction with public schools when fiscal strain is not occurring, which does not seem to be borne out empirically.

A competing theory of overt dissatisfaction with public schooling was developed by Weisbrod in 1977: the greater the consumer-to-consumer diversity of demand of a collective good, the larger will be the proportion

of the population who are either oversatisfied or undersatisfied with the level of that good provided by government. The argument is more fully developed in Weisbrod (The Voluntary Nonprofit Sector, Lexington, Mass., Heath and Co., 1977, pp. 51-76) and experimentally confirmed by Bendick ("Education as a Three-Sector Industry," in Weisbrod, op. cit., pp. 101-141). In his model of output determination in the government sector, Weisbrod (p. 54) argues that:

> . . . the political process of determining an output level is likely to leave some consumers dissatisfied because they are receiving and paying for too much of the good (schooling in this instance), while others are dissatisfied because they are receiving too little--that is, they would prefer to have the total tax payment and output level increased. The relative numbers of the two dissatisfied groups depend, of course, on the particular tax-pricing system and the political decision process. The simple majority-vote rule, for example, would satisfy only the median consumer, and so the population would be split evenly between those who demand more and those who demand less at the prevailing marginal tax-prices.

In theory, if all voters had the same level of consumer demand for a given level of a particular government good at a particular tax price, that level would be provided and there would be no dissatisfaction with the output level or the associated tax price. Conversely, the greater the heterogeneity of demand for a particular government good, the greater the dissatisfaction with the tax price and the output level of that government good.

Bendick tested this heterogeneity of demand hypothesis on public schools, using as his measure of overt dissatisfaction with public schools the relative market (i.e., non-public) shares of elementary and secondary education in each sector of the economy across the fifty states. He operationalized diversity of demand through two proxies: taste for education as measured by educational level of adults in the community; and ability to pay as represented by family income. (To compute the

residual adult education proxy variable, he rank ordered the adults in each state by increasing level of education achieved, excluded all observations at or below the median, and multiplied the educational achievement above the median by the number of persons in that class. The resultant figure was then restated in percentage terms by dividing total person-years of education above the median by the total person-years of education in the state. The computational procedure for measuring residual income paralleled that for residual education (ibid., p. 111).) His findings (regression results) are consistent with the hypothesis of greater overt dissatisfaction with public schools being associated with greater residual demand for education.

To the extent that our research interest is overt dissatisfaction with public schooling, the formulation of Weisbrod appears to be theoretically well grounded, empirically testable, and tentatively confirmed. The operational definition of dissatisfaction--whether it be proportion of the population who seek alternatives to the public schools or some measure of the amount of public debate surrounding public schools--is less significant here than the cause-effect postulation: all else equal, increased diversity of demand for education causes increased overt dissatisfaction with the public schools.

SCHOOL DISTRICT FISCAL STRAIN PAST AND FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade terms such as "fiscal strain" and "retrenchment" have become widely used to characterize a wide variety of phenomena in school districts. In particular, the agony faced by school board members and their superintendents as they encounter "fiscal strain" and "retrench" is widely documented through studies of school district policy making,[1] analyses of enrollment losses on operating costs,[2] reductions in service levels,[3] the impact of inflation,[4] reductions in course offerings,[5] school closing,[6] increasingly conservative administrator behavior,[7] and reduced teacher mobility.[8]

The "depression atmosphere" is in sharp contrast to that which existed only several decades ago and prompts the question: "Will public school board members and administrators progress through the next decade under the pall of fiscal strain and retrenchment which is 'worse' than, or 'better' than that which they face today?" This is the central question addressed in this article.

The question is particularly germane at this time because of the heightened sense of anguish which educators feel over the reductions in federal spending for education as part of "Reaganomics." Indeed, it is intellectually tempting to jump to the conclusion that current federal policies are likely to increase the fiscal strain faced in local school districts over the next decade. We (tentatively) have reached the opposite conclusion. It appears to us that, evaluated in their totality, federal policies currently in place will do more to ease fiscal strain in school districts than to exacerbate it. The major cause of fiscal strain in school districts appears to have been inflation, followed by externally

imposed mandates. To the degree that these forces diminish, fiscal strain in school districts can be expected to decline over the next decade.

In order to support this conclusion we need first to define fiscal strain and trace the roots of its causes. Once we have woven our way through definitions and causes of fiscal strain, we will be in a position to speculate on its severity in school districts over the next decade.

Definition of Fiscal Strain

There is not widespread consensus on the definition (or causes) of fiscal strain. Ours is arbitrary, but seems to capture most of the uses we have seen. Fiscal strain occurs when (1) conditions over which school boards and superintendents have no direct control, change in such a way as to reduce their discretion; and (2) the resulting new alternatives available to them are, as a group, less preferable than those facing them before conditions changed. This definition requires some elaboration.

School boards and superintendents are decision makers who have preferences. The school board and superintendent make the major decisions which affect how resources are allocated in a school district. They do this by making a wide variety of decisions, e.g., how much revenue to secure through tax levies; how large a budget should be; what clauses to approve in a contract; whether to keep a school open; what purchases to authorize; and so on. These district-level decision makers entertain a range of alternatives during their deliberations prior to deciding. They hold hearings, receive and give tentative opinions, analyze data, and ultimately take votes. They face fiscal strain when all the alternatives they currently face are, as a group, less preferable than the alternatives they faced a short time ago. Consider the totally hypothetical example of the school board that had to approve a district budget which was identical in all respects to the previous year's budget with one exception--a gallon of fuel oil had doubled in price. In this case we know that this year's set set of choices is less preferable than last year's set of choices, because our hypothetical school board would avoid paying more for fuel if it could.

The preferences of these decision makers play a major role in defining and explaining fiscal strain. School boards and superintendents do not consider alternatives without at the same time evaluating them. In fact, most of the testimony and acrimony surrounding budget proposals, school closing proposals, and contract proposals reflect the facts that individuals have preferences and that those preferences vary from individual to individual.

As district decision makers vote on budgets, school closings, etc., they are expressing relative preferences. In particular they are buying preferred goods and services, assembling them in preferred combinations, and using them to provide schooling in their district. Although not purchased simultaneously, the goods and services purchased by these decision makers are the most preferred, given available options perceived by them. In the purchasing process they "buy" teachers at a specified level of compensation, put them into classes of specified sizes and compositions, hire administrators for a specified number of school buildings, approve a specified array of courses, and so on. In all instances school boards and superintendents choose among alternative purchases. (The goods and services purchased for schooling are usually called "inputs" to schooling, and the unique combination of goods and services purchased by a school district is usually called a "bundle" of inputs.) Decision makers choose because they have to. The mechanism which forces these choices is the balancing equation of revenues and expenditures, i.e., the amount of money which can be used to purchase these inputs is limited by the amount of revenues received (usually called a "budget constraint").

In most instances the district decision maker would consume more of all inputs (to a point), but is prohibited by a budget constraint. The

budget constraint determines the level at which the decision maker can consume goods and services for schooling, but does not determine the specific mix of goods and services. For a given level of budget constraint, district decision makers decide that combination of schooling inputs which maximizes their preferences.[9] They do this by weighing their relative preferences, and purchasing that bundle of inputs which gives them the greatest overall satisfaction (or which most reduces dissatisfaction) and which is equal to but not greater than their budget constraint.

School boards and superintendents behave like consumers. District decision makers behave like "household decision-makers" or consumers, who think about whether to buy a new car, pay off old bills, insulate the house, go on a vacation, add to savings, take in a boarder, and so on. The alternatives considered at any one time are not comprehensive, nor of equal financial magnitude or consequence, and the relative importance or utility of each alternative to the individual is difficult for him or her to articulate. Nevertheless, the decisions do get made somehow, and the preferences of the decision maker determine the behavior.

Viewing the educational decision maker as a consumer of schooling inputs implies several characteristics of decision-making in school districts. First, because their wants are, for all practical purposes, unlimited and because consumption is constrained by budgets, the preferences of the decision maker are revealed by his or her behavior. Rather than having to ask them what they prefer, we can observe their consumer behavior. In particular we can see what they are "willing" to give up in order to gain additional units of the preferred input. The arguments put forth for closing a school building, for example, are often portrayed in terms of this "opportunity cost," e.g., the instructional programs that would have to be eliminated

in order to pay for keeping the school open. If the school stays open, it is more valued than the instructional programs.

Second, like other consumers educational decision makers have what economists call "diminishing marginal utility", which simply means that the satisfaction (utility) which results from purchasing one unit of a good or service is greater than the satisfaction resulting from purchasing the second (marginal) unit of that good or service. For decision makers this means that the more they consume of one input, all other things being equal, the less they value an additional increment of that input. For example, getting one set of new band uniforms for $X will give the decision maker a certain amount of satisfaction. Getting two new sets of band uniforms (one for home games and one for away games) at $2X will not give the district level decision maker twice the satisfaction.

Third, the consumer analogy suggests a general cause and description of fiscal strain in school districts. Budgets always constrain, i.e., no amount of money is enough, but the "hurt" is greater under some circumstances than others. A budget constraint which permits increasing levels of consumption over time is preferred to one in which only the current level of consumption is maintained; and, one in which the current level of consumption is maintained is preferable to one which forces a reduced level of consumption. Fiscal strain in school districts occurs when district-level decision makers are forced to purchase bundles of schooling inputs in the near future which differ from the current bundle of inputs and which are less preferred.

CAUSES OF FISCAL STRAIN

At first glance it may appear that there are many different causes of fiscal strain in school districts, if only because district decision makers

face large numbers of choices. As we have defined it, however, fiscal strain can emanate from one or more of only three general causes: changes in enrollment levels; changes in the prices of schooling inputs; and changes in the way in which inputs are combined for schooling (changes in the bundle of inputs).

Fiscal Strain Through Enrollment Decline. Consider first the widely documented relationships between enrollment decline and fiscal strain. Enrollment declines cause fiscal strain through four major cause-effect arguments: increasing fixed costs per pupil, declining staff-pupil ratios, average salary bracket creep, and district wealth bracket creep. Each focuses on a different manifestation of the fact that in the short run, enrollment changes "drive" both expenditures and revenues in school districts. The first three drive up costs facing the district, while the last one acts to drive down revenues. In order to provide a common basis for discussion, the arguments of each are summarized briefly here.

As enrollments decline, the fixed costs per pupil increase, everything else being equal. Many costs of schooling are not totally variable. When a district's enrollment changes from 400 to 399 each of the remaining students "carries" a little more of, for example, the superintendent's salary. Fixed costs per pupil and hence total costs per pupil go up when enrollments decline. Though widely acknowledged, few studies have attempted to derive fixed-variable cost ratios for individual districts. The declining staff-pupil ratio argument is no more than a variation on the fixed-variable argument. The district with 400 pupils and 1 teacher for each of 12 grades that loses one student in each grade, can not very well let a teacher go. The net effect is a reduction in pupil teacher ratios from 1:33.3 to 1:32.3.

As seniority rules force younger, (less expensive), teachers out of schools (or at least reduces their rate of entry) the average age and expense of staff increases disproportionately. This results in the average teacher salary creeping up the salary schedule.

At the same time the first three factors are at work driving up costs, the fourth factor (district wealth bracket creep) is driving down revenue. School districts across the U.S. receive about one half of their operating revenues from state and federal governments. This aid is awarded largely on the basis of numbers of children per district (counted either as enrolled in school or attending). Consequently, with fewer pupils the district receives less total financial assistance. In some instances this aid is further reduced because the district appears to be wealthier and hence deserving of less aid. Districts with low amounts of property wealth per pupil usually receive more aid than districts of the same size with greater property wealth per pupil because state governments attempt to equalize revenues available to "rich" and "poor" districts. As a district's enrollment declines, the amount of property wealth available per pupil increases. The district which loses enrollment appears to be richer, although it has only lost pupils, not gained in total property wealth. Because it appears richer, the state automatically provides less state aid per pupil to the district than would have been the case had the district not lost pupils. Because most enrollment-driven aid formulas are based on average rather than marginal (additional) cost concepts, districts which lose enrollment must resort to retrenchment even though the cause of the retrenchment is educationally unintended by state level decision makers.

These familiar arguments bring about fiscal strain in two ways. First because of the loss of state revenues from the loss of enrollments, the budget constraint is reduced (or not increased as much as it would otherwise be with

no enrollment loss). Because of the reduced budget constraint district decision makers are forced to consume inputs at a lower level. Second, they must also consume a less preferred bundle of inputs because many of the inputs are "lumpy", i.e., they can not be sold off in fractions. Although buildings, computers, and central office staff are obvious examples of lumpy inputs, it is even difficult to reduce some teaching staff in proportion to enrollment reductions. The net result is that district decision-makers have to settle for a less preferred bundle of inputs. They are consuming at a lower level and are forced to overconsume lumpy inputs.

Fiscal Strain Through Price Increases: Increases in price levels cause fiscal strain because, without a corresponding increase in the budget constraint, district decision-makers are forced to consume lower quantities of inputs. Although all prices are rising (as are budget constraints), some prices are rising faster than other prices or budget constraints. The most striking examples in school districts include fuel, health insurance, and teachers' salaries. (Teachers salaries are included here because of the compound effect of wage settlements and an aging work force.) Fiscal strain enters here in two ways. First, attempts are made to reduce consumption of those inputs whose prices have risen most dramatically. (The utility to the decision-maker of consuming those inputs is intimately associated with its opportunity costs, i.e., the other inputs that could not be purchased.) Second, not all of the reduction falls on the disproportionately high-priced inputs, and consumption of other inputs is also reduced. Declining marginal utility works "in reverse" here: the utility of the last unit of an input forgone or sold off is less than the utility attached to those not yet forgone or sold off. It "hurts" more to forgo each additional increment of an input. Cutting back energy consumption by 10% is easier than cutting it back by 10% a second time. As a result, consumption of other inputs will also be reduced.

Fiscal Strain Through Changes in the Input Mix. If changes in the input mix are forced legislatively by other than local decision makers without a corresponding increase in the budget constraint, district-decision-makers are, (in this case, by definition), forced to shift to a less preferred bundle of inputs. Examples include passage of P.L. 94-142 mandating the mix of resources to be used in instructing children with learning difficulties. Statutes and court decisions of wide variety act in this way, i.e., shifting from preferred to less preferred mixes of inputs, and include those dealing not only with instructional programs, but also personnel practices, students rights, building requirements, and support services.[10]

The three causes of fiscal strain emanate from three different sources and are reflected differently as they enter into the choosing behavior of district decision makers (summarized in Table One). They do however, have the same type of impact on school district decision makers: In each case decision-makers are forced to purchase less preferred bundles of inputs.

FISCAL STRAIN: COMPARING THE PAST TEN YEARS TO THE NEXT TEN YEARS

Fiscal strain as we use the term implies being forced to buy a bundle of inputs at one point in time (call it T + 1) which is less preferred to the "current" bundle of inputs (T). The three major forces described above have been acting both independently and jointly to cause this. Fiscal strain has become the norm for district level decision making over the last decade. Will it continue in its present form through the next decade? To answer this question we must seek answers to two supporting questions. First, what has been the relative contribution of each of the three forces in the past? Second, what is the prognosis for each of these forces, i.e., enrollment losses, price increases, and external mandates? Each of these questions is discussed separately below.

Table 1

Fiscal Strain Resulting in Consuming

Less Preferred Bundles of Inputs

HOW CAUSED	HOW REFLECTED
Enrollment Declines	- Budget Constraint Reduced - Disporportionately greater reductions in variable costs - Disporportionately fewer reductions in fixed costs
Price Increases	- Reduced quantity purchased especially of more costly inputs
Legislation External to district	- Forced change in input mix

Assessing the Relative Fiscal Strain Imposed by Enrollment Declines, Price Level Increases, and Changes in Input Mix. Little work has been done in education to attempt to isolate the unique effects of enrollments, prices, and input mix on fiscal strain. We can certainly make inferences on their combined effects by looking, for example, at changes in per pupil and total costs over long periods of time, by observing the continuing decline in pupil-teacher ratios since the end of the 19th century, and by recording changes in what a starting teacher makes over long periods of time. These data, however, are partial measures of each concept, and we are still faced with the difficulty in disentangling the contributions of each to fiscal strain.

In an attempt to measure the relative effects of each of the three factors on fiscal strain, we have constructed the following set of arguments. If district expenditures at a point in time (T) can be expressed as a function of enrollments, price levels and resource mix which existed at that time, then it would be possible to evaluate changes in district expenditures between two points in time (T and T+1) as a function of changes in enrollments, changes in price levels, and changes in input mix. Be doing this, we can measure the change in expenditures between T and T+1 which is attributable to changes in enrollments as a function of new (T+1) enrollments, old (T) price levels, and old (T) technology. In like manner, we can measure that change in expenditures between T and T+1 which is attributable to changes in price levels as a function of old (T) enrollments, new (T+1) price levels, and old (T) technology. Finally, the change in expenditures between T and T+1 which is attributable to changes in input mix can be formulated as a function of old (T) enrollments, old (T) price levels, and the new (T+1) mix of resources. We can then compare the resulting calculations, i.e., changes in total district expenditure resulting from changes in enrollments, changes in price levels, and changes in resource mixes.

Using the above model as a guide, data were gathered from a single school district which described total expenditures as a function of enrollments, prices, and input mixes. The same data were gathered for two periods, 1976 and 1980, and presented in Tables 2 and 3. Enrollment and staffing ratios for the two periods are listed in the first table, while program expenditure information combined with staffing ratios are presented in the second. Enrollment, price, and input mixes were calculated for each program portrayed in Table 3. A discussion of the K-6 program can serve as an illustration of how the data were assembled.

The first row entry in Table 3 reads as follows:

> For the K-6 program, a total of $5,990,000 was spent in 1976. For every 28.5 students in this program, $25,200 was spent. In 1980, $8,160,000 was spent on this same program. For every 25.2 students, $35,300 was spent.

By referring back to Table 2, we know that 6772 students were served in this program in 1976 in classes where the pupil teacher ratio was 28.5. In 1980, 5830 students were served in this program in classes where the pupil teacher ratio was 25.2. Similar price and resource mix data were developed for the other major categories of expenditure of the school district.

This particular formulation of data had to reflect not only the enrollments, prices, and resources mixes of programs, but the aggregate program expenditure figures (from adding program costs) had to reflect fairly well what was actually spent in the district in each of the two years. Total expenditures captured by this particular formulation were $27,457,000 in 1976 and $40,696,000 in 1980. (Actual expenditures in the district were higher by several million dollars in both periods, reflecting expenditures for debt service, tuition, and fund transfers which had been excluded.) The subsequent step in the analysis was to determine how much influence each of the three factors had on the increase between the $27.4 million in 1976 and the $40.6 million in 1980.

Table 2

ENROLLMENT AND INPUT MIX 1976-1980

		1976			1980		
		Students	Teachers	Ratio	Students	Teachers	Ratio
Enrollments	K-6	6772	238	28.5	5830	231	25.2
	7-8	2056	113	18.2	1914	105	18.3
	9-12	4244	227	18.7	4069	232	17.5
	Special Education	141			230		
		13,213			12,043		
	Guidance	6,300	18	350.0	5,983	19	315.0

		1976	1980
Buildings	K-6	13	13
	7-8	3	3
	9-12	2	2

Table 3

Price Levels of Input Mix 1976-1980

	"Program"	1976 Expenditures ($000's)		1980 Expenditures ($000's)	
		Total	Per Unit	Total	Per Unit
Student Determinants	K-6	$5,990	$ 25.2/28.5 students	$8,160	$ 35.3/25.2 students
	7-8	$2,632	$ 23.3/18.2 students	$3,553	$ 33.8/18.3 students
	9-12	$5,677	$ 25.1/18.7 students	$8,327	$ 35.9/17.5 students
	Guidance	$ 533	$ 30.7/350 students	$ 815	$ 42.9/315 students
	Special Education	$ 770	$ 5.5/ students	$1978	$ 8.6/ students
	Transportation	$1,241	$ 9.4/100 students	$2,454	$ 20.4/100 students
School Determinants	K-6	$2,558	$196.8/building	$3,594	$276.5/building
	7-8	$ 676	$225.3/building	$ 761	$380.5/building
	9-12	$1,945	$648.3/building	$2828	$942.7/building
	Facilities Management	$2,190	$109.5/facility	$3,355	$167.8/facility
District Operation		$3,225		$4,871	
Total		$27,457		$40,696	

The effects of changes in enrollments on changes in total costs are portrayed in Table 4. Enrollments for 1980 were combined with the 1976 resource mix and 1976 prices, and total expenditures dropped from $27,457,000 to $26,427,000. (Real per pupil expenditures increased from $2078 to $2194. The effects of changes in price levels on changes in total costs are portrayed in Table 5. Price levels in 1980 were combined with the 1976 resource mix and 1976 enrollments, and total expenditures rose from $27,457,000 to $38,487,000. The effects of changes in resource mix on changes in total costs are portrayed in Table 6. The resource mix existing in 1980 was combined with 1976 price levels and 1976 enrollments. As a result total expenditures rose from $27,457,000 to $30,404,000. Relative effects are summarized in Table 7.

Because both the theoretical framework and the methodology of this study are exploratory at this stage, generalizations must of necessity be tentative. The findings do, however, suggest several possibilities. First, the impact on fiscal strain of declining enrollments is not by itself a major cause of fiscal strain. This conclusion supports the outlook of the Commission on Declining Enrollments of Canada:

> The main challenges facing the people who make decisions for our education systems do not come from declining enrollments, but from the economic and public finance conditions that characterize the late 1970's and promise to be facts of life for some years to come. These conditions make it difficult to accommodate decreasing enrollments, but they are also conditions that would have made it far more difficult to accommodate increasing enrollments.

Second, price level changes are by far the greatest factor affecting fiscal strain. High rates of inflation have caused much greater fiscal strain in school districts than enrollment declines. This may not be generally recognized because of the relatively "invisible" nature of inflation. Third, changes in resource mix account for a sizable proportion of the fiscal strain felt in this district.

Table 4

EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN ENROLLMENTS ON

TOTAL COSTS 1976-1980

		1980 Enrollment ÷ 1976 Input Mix	1976 Rates ($000's)	Costs ($000's)
Student Determinants	K-6 (5830/28.5)	205	$25.2	$5166
	7-8 (1914/18.2)	106	$23.3	$2470
	9-12 (4069/18.7)	218	$25.1	$5472
	Guidance (5983/350)	18	$30.7	$ 553
	Special Education	230	$ 5.5	$1265
	Transportation	102.43	$ 9.4	$1132
School Factors	K-6	13	$196.8	$2258
	7-8	2	$225.3	$ 451
	9-12	3	$648.3	$1945
	Facilities	20	$109.5	$2190
District Operation		-	$3225	$3225
				$26,427

Table 5

EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN PRICE LEVELS

ON TOTAL COSTS 1976-1980

		1976 Rates ($000's)	1980 Rates @ 1.4 ($000's)	1976 Enrollments (1976 units)	Cost ($000's)
Student Determination	K-6	$25.2	$35.3	238	$8401
	7-8	$23.3	$32.6	113	$3684
	9-12	$25.1	$35.1	227	$7968
	Guidance	$30.7	$42.9	18	$ 777
	Special Education	$ 5.5	$ 7.7	141	$1086
	Transportation	$ 9.4	$13.2	132.13	$1744
School Factors	K-6	$196.8	$275.5	13	$3582
	7-8	$255.3	$315.4	3	$ 946
	9-12	$648.3	$907.6	3	$2723
	Facilities	$109.5	$153.3	20	$3066
District Operations		$3225	$4515	-	$4515
					$38,487

Table 6

EFFECTS OF CHANGES INPUT MIX

ON TOTAL COSTS 1976-1980

		1976 Enrollments (1980 units)	1976	Cost ($000's)
Student Determinants	K-6 (6772/25.2)	269	$25.2	$6779
	7-8 (2056/18.3)	113	$24.1	$2723
	9-12 (4244/17.5)	243	$25.6	$6221
	Guidance (6300/315)	20	$30.6	$ 612
	Special Education	141	$ 6.1	$ 830
	Transportation	132.13	$14.6	$1929
School Factors	K-6	13	$197.5	$2568
	7-8	3	$271.8	$ 815
	9-12	3	$675.4	$2020
	Facilities	20	$119.9	$2398
District Operation		-	$3479	$3479
				$30,404

Table 7

COMPARING THE RELATIVE EFFECTS OF

ENROLLMENT, INPUT MIX AND PRICE LEVEL CHANGES

			1976-1980		
ENROLLMENT	1976	1976	1976	1980	1980
TECHNOLOGY	1976	1976	1980	1976	1980
PRICE LEVEL	1976	1980	1976	1976	1980
TOTAL COST ($000's)	$27,457	$38,487	$30,404	$26,427	$40,696
DIFFERENCE '76 ($000's)		$11,030	$ 2,947	$(1030)	$13,239
COMBINED EFFECTS ($000's)					$12,947
MEASUREMENT ERROR ($000's)					$ 292

Fiscal Strain Over the Next Decade: How Different? If our formulation of fiscal strain and our estimates of the relative impact of contributing causes are only approximately correct, then the prognosis for future fiscal strain depends on one's prognosis for enrollment changes, price level changes, and externally imposed changes in resource mixes. Most important among these causes is inflation. Current federal fiscal policies place great importance on reducing rates of inflation, and at the time this is being written there is some evidence the policies are having an effect. To the extent that this can be achieved, everything else being equal, fiscal strain facing school district decision makers will ease over the next decade.

There are also several indications that the flow of regulations from higher levels of government to school districts may be decreasing, notably in the areas of categorical programs which are being folded into block grants and in the degree to which regulations are enforced. Despite the merits of a particular program or regulation as seen by its originators, both trends (if they are trends) will provide local decision-makers greater options, and reduce fiscal strain.

Even though enrollment declines appear to have less impact on fiscal strain, here too there are indications that the rates of decline are beginning to decrease. Even the most pessimistic demographic forecasts indicate moderate increases by the end of the decade.

Taken as a group, the three major causes of fiscal strain in school districts are likely to abate in the future if present indicators are generally accurate. This does not imply that the "heyday" of high levels of educational input consumption are just around the corner. Rather, district decision-makers, after weathering over a decade of severe constraints on their consumption of educational inputs, may be passing into a decade where the strain may not be quite as severe.

FOOTNOTES

1. William L. Boyd, "Education Policy making in Declining Suburban School Districts: Some Preliminary Findings," Education and Urban Society, May, 1979, pp. 333-366.

2. Guilbert C. Hentschke, "Assessing the Impact of Enrollment Decline on Operating Costs," Educational Economics, May-June, 1977, pp. 10-14.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Frederick Dembowski, "The Effects of Declining Enrollment on the Instructional Programs of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools," Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, 1980, ED 184 208.

6. R.F. Yeager, "Rationality and Retrenchment: Use of a Computer Simulation to Aid Decision Making in School Closings," Education and Urban Society, May, 1979, pp. 296-312.

7. Thomas Stefonek, Cutback Management in Public Organizations. Information Series, Volume 7, Number 3. Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction, Division of Management and Planning Services, ED 192 441.

8. Education Commission of the States, Retrenchment in Education. The Outlook for Women and Minorities. Report No. F76-9, Denver, Education Commission of the States, ED 141 954.

9. Their preferences may or may not be "educationally sound" in the eyes of other educators. In fact educators and others often disagree over the soundness of certain decisions, which is why, for example, federal education officials feel compelled to include penalties for non-compliance when preparing legislation which in effect overrides the preferences of local education decision makers.

10. Not all changes in the mix of inputs are the result of externally mandated changes or of the effects of volume or price level changes. Everything else being equal, the preferences of district decision makers may simply shift over time, not unlike consumer tastes.

Appendix D

The Problems and Limitations of Citizens Advisory Committees

by

Dennis R. Wheaton

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There are often accusations that citizens advisory committees (CACs) are set up by school officials to legitimate decisions already decided upon, and that they are a form of rubberstamping the inevitable. This charge occurs whether the CACs make specific recommendations or are specifically authorized only to explore and lay out alternatives. When rubberstamping or legitimizing decisions between the time they are actually made and the time they are publicly and legally voted upon is actually the case, the problem is for the board and administration to maximize the probability that the CAC will issue a report favorable to pre-established decisions, or present enough alternatives that officials can pick and choose among them what is desired. The Camden District experience with a citizens task force is instructive here.

Mr. Hoffman, a board member whose wife was on the CAC, said it was divided up into three subcommittees: the school finances, the buildings, and the population trends subcommittees. The three reports made up the total report, which was not released until the spring of the year. He felt the wording was quite vague, because the panel had a difficult time reaching a majority opinion due to the fact that there was a lot of "wrangling" on the panel. He thought that instead of making recommendations, the panel ended up painting several scenarios of what might happen if action X was taken as opposed to action Y. However, despite this vague wording, the board "interpreted" the report as saying that they should close schools. Mr. Hoffman said that the lack of consensus on the panel existed because those who lived in certain school areas, where their small schools were the most likely

to be closed, opposed the closing of schools, while those from schools with larger enrollments thought that the closing of schools was the best answer. There were several open meetings where "the community showed up" and protested school closings, but the board decided to close two schools at the end of the following school year.

A resident of one of the neighborhoods in which a school was closed, Mr. Holland, ran for the board after the closing and won. He felt the handling of the school closings had been very poor, and had contributed much to the poor community relations which existed at the time of his interview. This board member also felt that the open meetings which were held for the decision to close the schools were not very helpful, that board members had already made up their minds before the open hearings, that the attitude of board members at the public meetings was "borderline arrogance," and that the board members would not have changed their minds no matter what happened. He thought the task force had done a very good job of gathering information for the board, but the board did not listen to their recommendations, and did a superficial job in considering the alternatives in the report. Mr. Holland thought that during the school closings the administration used the board as a scapegoat. The administration did not want to be held responsible for the school closings; but he also pointed out that, in turn, the board used the task force as a scapegoat.

Another board member, Dr. Jordan, stated he thought part of the reason for having the task force was to bring the community in on the decision-making process so they would not feel that the board was closing their schools without their having any say in the matter. But he also admitted that part of the reason may have been because the board

could shift some of the blame for a distasteful decision on to the task force. He explicitly stressed that board members had not made up their minds beforehand on what ought to be done. He added that the board told the task force that they would not bind themselves to the panel's recommendations, although the board wanted the community's input and expertise. Dr. Jordan said he didn't think that, on the whole, citizens committees were a very good idea. He felt it amounted to turning over one's responsibilities as a board member to people who are not elected. He thought that an elected board member should make those decisions and take the blame or credit for them. He also pointed out that if the board decides against the recommendations of the CAC, then all those carefully selected community representatives who put in much time and energy become soured against the board and will be less willing to help the board the next time it needs their cooperation.

Dr. Jordan also said that the people on these committees tend to end up supporting the same conclusions that they began with, namely, their own biases. They don't have the same responsibility to the community to come to unbiased conclusions. There seemed to be factions in the CAC that could be identified by school area. These factions looked at the neighboring school, considered its strong and weak points, and then argued that the criteria used to decide which school should be closed and which should remain open should be based on all the weak points of the neighboring school and all the strong points of their own school. Another Camden board member, Mr. Jones, also didn't think the CAC was a good way to reach decisions concerning coping with decline, agreeing with Dr. Jordan that the members of the task force viewed the situation through their own biases.

Board member Darby thought the CAC had been helpful, and although the board ignored the minority reports in it, in general he agreed with its conclusions. But the data that they had to work with was provided by the administration, and he thought his data was biased because "the bureaucracy tended to be interested only in self-perpetuation."

Board member Peterson said the original idea for the task force had come from the administration, but the board then endorsed it. It was beneficial because it incorporated people from a broad cross-section of the community and brought them into the decision-making process. On the negative side, when the panel made its report after two months of meetings, it tended to rush the decision-making process. Mr. Peterson felt the report was more or less dumped into the laps of the board members, and the community then looked to them to see what they were going to do about it.

When the report of the CAC was made public, added Mr. Peterson, it aroused the fears of those who lived in certain areas. People came to the public hearings in a very angry mood, and these emotional influences upon the board thus made it more difficult for them to reach a rational decision. And then when the report had been finished and discussed, many felt the board was only rubberstamping the report. They felt the board had orchestrated the entire scenario in order to relieve itself of the responsibility of closing the schools. This was not the case, Mr. Peterson stated. He also felt that, although there were some factions on the panel, the majority agreed with its major conclusions that one or two schools needed to be closed.

The Camden superintendent also appeared to want to relieve himself of the responsibility of closing the schools. He said the biggest

mistake was that the board had acted quite suddenly in one of its school closings and this upset some parents who were caught unawares. He did not think he could be blamed for this outcome, however, because it was a board decision.

A Camden teachers union leader observed that the board had made some mistakes in the way it went about the closing of the two schools. She thought there were too many open hearings, that the board did not handle itself well, and emotions got out of hand. A number of parents were so upset that they sent their children to parochial school rather than having them continue in the school district. She thought there was logic in closing the two schools they did because of their location, but the board ignored the findings of the CAC. Finally, a Camden parent said she wasn't sure how useful the task force was; perhaps, she commented, it functioned only to sanction the decision of the board, but she thought it really did have an influence on the board's decision.

In sum, the pattern in Camden was that the superintendent first recommended to the board that they create a CAC task force to study the problem of declining enrollments--meaning in a not-so-hidden agenda: which school(s) do we close? The task force was the arena in which the various neighborhood factions jousted for victory by seeking to control the major recommendations of the final CAC report. Momentum was strong by the time the report was formally presented to the board and several public hearings on the results of the task force report were held. Here minority and isolated factions of the community could once again voice their objections, while those who favored the majority recommendations of the report (closing someone else's school(s)) admonished the board to take responsibility for the situation, make a decision, and

get it over with. The task force recommendations were legitimate grounds for making and rationalizing a decision which was bound to be unpopular with some factions however it went. The decision was made too quickly for those who lost their neighborhood schools, and there was a strong impression on their part that the board was stampeded into a decision, or else the whole affair was rigged from the beginning in an effort to shift blame away from district officials. In addition, some task force members and board members suspected the administration controlled the information given to them in order to load the odds in its favor.

If the CAC report had been one with multiple possible alternatives without recommendations, and the board's decision was closely based on one set of alternatives, those community members favoring, and perhaps helping to formulate, the losing alternatives may believe the board willfully ignored the findings of the CAC and made their decisions on arbitrary, preconceived, and most likely partisan reasons of their own. Thus, the impression of the losing faction in such a situation in another district was that they had been victimized by a "kangaroo court."

In Weston District, the pattern was somewhat like that of Camden, but without the sense of momentum carrying the decision process quickly from CAC report to school closing decisions. There was in Weston an additional intermediate stage of one year in which school grade levels were reorganized before the board began publicly considering school closings. But here as well, a parent and citizens committee member, unhappy over the closing of her neighborhood school, said that the committee was fed biased data by district officials: "They gave us the information they wanted us to have."

In the working class district of Alton, there were several waves of Future Planning Committees. The first was a true CAC and included teachers, PTA members, and business leaders of the community, as well as school board members--but this group could not agree on any suggestions. In characterizing the whole set of processes leading up to school closings, one Alton school board member, Mr. Bukowski, said the attempt to involve the community in the decision-making process had not worked out. A later-constituted Future Planning Committee (FPC) was composed of only three board members, and there was disagreement among them about whether or not to tell the community which schools it was planning to close. Mr. Bukowski was in the minority in favoring openness, but the other two board members did not want to reveal the decision because the board was planning to hold a referendum to remodel one elementary school into a jr. high school, and they wanted the referendum held without the public knowing which schools would be closed if the referendum failed or passed.

Another board member, Mr. Canfield, who was not on the FPC, mentioned in his interview the secrecy of the later FPC in not revealing the alternatives being considered in order to avoid rumors starting in the community. Ms. Abcheck, a member of the three-board member FPC, did not think the administration should give out detailed information on enrollment, costs, etc., that was used in deciding which schools should be closed, because district residents were very protective of their own schools; and doing so would only promote rivalries between school areas in their scramble to save their own schools from being closed. The superintendent's job, she said, is to work out the details of reorganizing the district after the board has decided which schools

to close. The third member of the board FPC, Mr. Eberhardt, felt that the administration gave information to the school board which would influence it to make a certain kind of decision even though this information was not perhaps completely accurate. He also thought past FPCs were pressured to make decisions in a hurry, and often did not have adequate information on which to base their decisions.

Thus both board and CAC members in several districts suspected the administration was surreptiously controlling major policy decisions through its selective presentation of the available information on which the decisions must be based. CAC members (and other residents) whose interests do not prevail in major decline decisions may blame, in turn, both the administration for controlling data and the board for not following the CAC report recommendations, as well as for already having determined the outcome before the whole charade got underway. Clever administrators may appear to emerge from such a decision process with the most influence and least public responsibility.

Appendix E

Publications Emanating from the Project

Publications Emanating from the Project

Boyd, W. L. Educational policy making in declining suburban school districts: Some preliminary findings. Education and Urban Society, 1979, 11(3), 333-366.

Boyd, W. L. Retrenchment in American education: The politics of efficiency. California Journal of Teacher Education, 1982, 9(1), 67-78.

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